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Editor-in-Chief	Chris Youngs
Senior Art Director	Jon Schindehette
Web Specialist	Steve Winter
Web Production	Bart Carroll
Contributing Authors	Ed Greenwood, Matt James, Jeff LaSala, Peter Lee, Mike Mearls, Cal Moore, David Noonan, James Wyatt
Developers	Peter Schaefer, Stephen Schubert, Rodney Thompson
Editors	Miranda Horner, Steve Winter
Cover Artist	Lucas Graciano
Contributing Artists	Wayne England, Michael Franchina, Jorge Lacera, Raven Mimura, William O'Connor, David Rapoza, Evan Shipard, John Stanko, Matias Tapia
Cartographers	Sean Macdonald, Mike Schley
Publishing Production Specialists	Angelika Lokotz, Erin Dorries, Christopher Tardiff
Web Development	Mark A. Jindra
D&D Creative Manager	Christopher Perkins
Executive Producer, D&D Insider	Chris Champagne
Director of RPG R&D	Bill Slavicsek

Special Thanks

Richard Baker, Greg Bilsland, Michele Carter, Jennifer Clarke Wilkes, Andy Collins, Bruce R. Cordell, Jeremy Crawford, Peter Lee, Mike Mearls, Kim Mohan, Cal Moore, Peter Schaefer, Stephen Schubert, Matthew Sernett, Rodney Thompson, James Wyatt

Doors

Let's talk about doors.

Of course, when I write "door," I mean "obstacle," because that's what a door is. Any sort of obstacle serves basically the same function as a door, but a door makes a nice metaphor.

The presence of a door introduces several things into your game: the unknown, temptation, difficulty, and a branching of the plot.

A door represents the unknown for the obvious reason that you don't know what's on the other side; there's a door between you and it. What adventurer can resist the lure of the unknown? Isn't uncovering the unknown at least part of what drives characters to become adventurers in the first place? We all know about reluctant heroes forced to serve the greater good by unwelcome destiny, but I've grown a bit tired of them. Another breed of fortune-hunter strikes out into the world in a straightforward quest for adventure, glory, wealth, or simply to satisfy their wanderlust. A famous writer of Westerns (I forget which one) wrote that Americans moved west "to git something, to git away from something, or just to git." My favorite characters fall into that category. They're the types who are fascinated by doors.

A door represents temptation because it implies that something worth having is on the other side. The person who installed the door thought it was a good idea to seal off whatever lies beyond, implying great value ... or great danger. By its nature, a door appeals to a lust for adventure, wealth, and glory.

A door represents difficulty because it prevents characters from easily getting at what's on the other side. The door might be locked, stuck, or sealed with magic. Some means must be found to get it open. That might be brute force or it might be solving a clever puzzle. Either way, there's no moving forward until that hurdle is cleared.

Finally, a door represents a branching of the path. Unless your door sits at the end of a dead-end hallway, characters have a choice to make: go through the door, with all its potential struggle, danger, and reward, or pass it by and continue on down the corridor. The DM needs to be ready for both eventualities. One decision might lead to riches, glory, and salvation while the other leads to pain, death, and catastrophe. As in life, all of those need to be on the table as possible outcomes. Where there's no risk, there are no heroes.

What effect have doors had on your D&D games? How have adventures grown or changed direction because characters did, or did not, go through a particular door? Let us know at dndinsider@wizards.com.

SCALES OF WAR™

"Tiamat who formed all things,
Made in addition weapons invincible;
she spawned monster-serpents,
Sharp of tooth, and merciless of fang;
With poison, instead of blood,
she filled their bodies.

Fierce monster-vipers
she clothed with terror,
With splendor she decked them,
she made them of lofty stature.
Whoever beheld them,
terror overcame him,
Their bodies reared up and none
could withstand their attack."

–Enuma Elish, The Epic of Creation,
L.W. King trans.

EPIC
21–30

Last Breath of the Dragon Queen

An adventure for 30th-level characters

By David Noonan
illustration by Lucas Graciano & William O'Connor
cartography by Sean Macdonald and Mike Schley

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"Last Breath of the Dragon Queen" is an adventure for five 30th-level characters. By the end of the adventure, the characters should have saved the universe, slain a god, and achieved their epic destinies, thus ending the campaign. This adventure is the final chapter in the Scales of War adventure path, the culmination of events that started with "Rescue at Rivenroar" thirty levels ago. The "Last Breath of the Dragon Queen" also plays well as a standalone adventure and can be adapted for the conclusion of any world-spanning campaign with Tiamat as the final foe.

In "Last Breath of the Dragon Queen," the characters travel to Tiamat's lair in the Caverns of Fiery Splendor in Azharul, which is part of Tytherion, the Endless Night. There they face Tiamat's most loyal guardians, then the Dragon Queen herself in all her five-headed splendor. They aren't fighting a reflection of Tiamat, an avatar of Tiamat, an aspect of Tiamat, or anything less than the actual goddess at the zenith of her power. If the characters succeed, they will have achieved something truly epic—a fitting end to a campaign spanning more than a dozen adventures.

BACKGROUND

The battle for the City of Brass is over—and the good guys won. But the city is in ruins, Bahamut's army is in disarray, and Tiamat is desperately trying to recover from her army's appalling defeat.

The Dragon Queen is finding it difficult to do so. As the goddess of greed, envy, and wealth, Tiamat used those motivators to great effect among her worshipers, soldiers, and allies. Now that she's fallen on hard times, Tiamat is finding few allies—dragons or otherwise—willing to stand with her now that the chips are down. In short, Tiamat is discovering that her very nature doesn't induce loyalty in uncertain times. Furthermore, she's discovering that encouraging competition and rivalry among her underlings is at best a double-edged sword. Many of Tiamat's lieutenants are taking advantage of the Dragon Queen's distraction to settle old scores and climb the pecking order on the backs of their rivals.

As soon as word reached Tytherion of the defeat at the City of Brass, the great dragons, soldiers, cultists, and many of Tiamat's most powerful agents started deserting her, carrying off much of her wealth and leaving her vulnerable. From the ancient wyrms that advised Tiamat to the lowly dragonborn guards on her ramparts, everyone took what they could and fled to some dark, quiet corner, fearful of a world with a diminished Tiamat—and fearful they'd face Tiamat's wrath when she decides who's to blame for recent events.

If Bahamut's army arrived to confront Tiamat in her lair right now, they would find that much of it had already been looted by Tiamat's fleeing servants. But Bahamut can't get his army to Tiamat's lair in Tytherion—it's exhausted, battered, disorganized, and still engaged in restoring some semblance of order to the City of Brass. Furthermore, the Platinum Dragon is worried that darkening Tytherion's skies with metallic dragons and an army of paladins would be counterproductive. An invading army might galvanize Tiamat's forces to end the infighting and unite against the enemy they were born and bred to fight.

Bahamut has more than a shining army at his disposal, however: He has a small group of mortals that collectively rival the gods in power (the heroes, in other words). In all this disarray, a small group of heroes trying to infiltrate Tiamat's lair might not attract much attention—assuming they can reach Tiamat's lair in the first place. For obvious reasons, Bahamut has little insight into the mazelike Caverns of Fiery Splendor, nor does he know where within those caverns Tiamat's lair could be found.

The Platinum Dragon does, however, have a lead. Centuries ago, a paladin named Berath led a crusade into the Caverns of Fiery Splendor. He'd grown weary of the endless struggle between Bahamut and Tiamat and declared that only a frontal assault against Tiamat would end her "games of deceit and death." Bahamut counseled against Berath's crusade, but Berath and a host of knights rode boldly into the Caverns of Fiery Splendor, determined to slay Tiamat and end the war.

Although noble, such an effort was doomed to failure. Despite several victories within the caverns, no one from Berath's crusade reached Tiamat's lair or escaped to tell the tale. Berath himself, however, is a different story. Sustained by his desire to end the dragons' war and buoyed by Tiamat's weakness, he has recently rematerialized as a ghost haunting the Caverns of Fiery Splendor. Bahamut sensed the return of one of his most strident paladins and instructed Berath to scout a safe path through the caverns and to guide a smaller but more potent second crusade that will slay Tiamat once and for all.

Bahamut has another agent within the Caverns as well, though he doesn't realize it. Zehir has no love for Bahamut, but he's been locked in a territorial struggle with Tiamat for millennia over who controls Tytherion. Zehir is thinking along the same lines as Bahamut: Sending a horde of snakes into the Caverns of Fiery Splendor would only provide common cause for Tiamat's erstwhile allies. One of Zehir's spies, however, has seen part of Tiamat's lair firsthand, and it's certainly to Zehir's advantage if that information gets into the hands of Tiamat's enemies, even if they are Bahamut's friends.

Adventure Synopsis

At the start of the adventure, the adventurers meet Bahamut in his "Old Man with the Canaries" guise (by now they should know exactly who they're talking to). Bahamut explains that Tiamat's dragon allies are deserting her, driven by cowardice, fear of Tiamat's temper, and greed for the treasures in Tiamat's domain. While Bahamut's army has achieved a great victory, it is in no shape to march on Tytherion itself. The characters are, Bahamut explains, capable of killing Tiamat once and for all if they can get to her lair before she has a chance to regroup and gather her allies around her. Furthermore, Bahamut gives them instructions for meeting Berath, the ghost of a paladin who once sought to slay Tiamat. And a mysterious agent of Zehir meets the characters and gives them a password that a spy near Tiamat's lair will ask for.

Bahamut gives the heroes a powerful gift—canaries that can transform into gold dragons—and transports them to Tytherion. There the characters see Tiamat's forces fleeing, fighting among each other, and looting their own fortress. After a brief battle, they meet Berath, who guides them through the Caverns of Fiery Splendor. Just before they enter, they meet Theel, one of Zehir's spies in the Caverns.

Theel takes the characters to the Fountain Chamber, where they can see Tiamat's shadow far above them. They learn she's sequestered herself on the floating platform and is using scrying rituals to threaten and cajole her far-flung supporters. The characters quickly discover that a potent array of disintegrator beams and warding magic prevents intruders from simply flying or teleporting up to the Dragon Queen. Each of the five disintegrators, Theel explains, is linked to an ancient dragon in a nearby cavern. Five caverns, five dragons—defeat them and the heroes don't need to worry about the five disintegrators.

As the characters enter the five dragons' chambers, they learn that each of the ancient dragons is a brood mother carrying Tiamat's eggs in a forced breeding effort that has so far failed. For all her power, Tiamat is unique among dragonkind and cannot lay eggs herself. The characters defeat each brood mother in turn, rendering the disintegrators useless.

Then, it's a battle royale with Tiamat: a no-holds-barred battle with a full-fledged deity. If the characters win, Bahamut arrives and shows them the world utterly transformed by their actions: a world free from the greed and envy that Tiamat upheld. At that point, the heroes move on to their individual epic destinies, and you can set the stage for your next campaign if you wish.

The Quests

In "Last Breath of the Dragon Queen"," the PCs are at or near their final state. They're either 30th level or will be within a few encounters. There isn't much point in acquiring great quantities of further experience or treasure. By now the characters should be as well-equipped as they're ever going to be. And the adventure is fundamentally simple: Go to Tiamat's lair and defeat her, ushering in a new age and a transformed world. Thus it's difficult to justify the same sort of quests they've had in the past.

One possible exception is this: If one or more characters has unfinished business in regard to an epic destiny (see Epic Destinies on page 48), it might be helpful for the player if you describe the resolution of the epic destiny with a quest.

Preparing for Adventure

"Last Breath of the Dragon Queen" is largely a self-contained adventure, requiring little in terms of advance preparation. If you've been playing the Scales of War adventure path from the beginning, you know your players and your DMing style better than we do. We're confident in your ability to prepare.

Running a 30th-level adventure is inherently complex. Here are three tips that will save you time and effort when the dice are actually rolling.

Know the Heroes: If one character employs the stealth rules nearly every round, take the time before the session to educate yourself so you can adjudicate it quickly. Look at each character sheet and ask yourself: "What tricks is this guy going to pull?" You aren't necessarily looking for ways to counter character tactics. You're looking for aspects of the rules you need to brush up on, and you're seeking ways to streamline those moments at the table. Go ahead and tell your players what you're up to. If you explain that you're just trying to make sure you're up to speed with the rules, the players won't have any lingering suspicions that you're trying to thwart their every move. (Not all players think like this, but some do, and it's a perfectly natural impulse.)

Know Dragons: An adventure laden with dragons in all their solo-monster glory is a fitting end for a long campaign like Scales of War, so "Last Breath of the Dragon Queen" intentionally has more than its fair share of "boss fights" against dragons. If you spend 30 minutes looking at the various dragon stat blocks and thinking about key tactical considerations

(how best to use a breath weapon, when to spend action points, what are the advantages and disadvantages of flying, and so on), you'll be better prepared for the encounters you're going to run.

Dragon battles are a learning process for both you and your players, and we've designed "Last Breath of the Dragon Queen" so that everyone at your table will get "better" at dragons (either fighting them or fighting as them) as the adventure progresses. Your tactics will naturally evolve, and so will those of the characters. By the time the heroes face off against Tiamat, everyone at your table should be an absolute expert in dragon battles.

Prepare the Flashbacks: Throughout the adventure, Tiamat is surrounded by scrying frames: massive portals (not unlike modern-day video screens) that she uses to contact her allies and worshippers across the universe and also as a focus for divination rituals. When the PCs confront Tiamat on her platform, the scrying frames show key moments where the characters previously triumphed over adversity and defeated Tiamat's forces. (Tiamat is none too happy that the scrying frames have apparently turned on her, too.)

This is a chance to remind the players—not the characters, but the players—of all they've been through to reach the conclusion of the adventure path. You'll want two prepared-in-advance "highlight reel" moments for each hero plus a few key moments of general interest, such as the breaking of the siege in the City of Brass. Every round during the battle with Tiamat, describe a moment briefly: "The northwest scrying frame comes to life, showing Dendrantos delivering the final blow against Arantor (from "Betrayal at Monadhan"), then collapsing from the ongoing cold damage."

The best source for those flashback moments is the players themselves. Ask them to provide a couple of "highlight reel" moments in advance. It's best if you can mask your intention and surprise them a bit. If possible, use casual conversation in the days and weeks before running "Last Breath of the Dragon Queen" to gather material for those flashbacks. Get your players to reminisce about their favorite moments from previous adventures, then use those memories as the basis for flashbacks in encounter G11. Draw out reticent players with leading questions about what adventures they really enjoyed, when they knew they had a great character, and so forth. But that's just the first step.

When you need to describe the flashbacks, you'll also be running a literal god on the table—you're going to be a busy DM. And you don't want to put the high drama of the Tiamat battle 'on pause' while you think up a good flashback. So the second step is to write those down ahead of time and have them ready to go. Then you can use all of your precious brain capacity for the in-the-moment work of being Tiamat.

What You Need (and Don't Need) to Play

This adventure contains everything you need to play, including background information, setup, encounters, and maps. You might wish to review any appropriate Dungeons & Dragons® 4th Edition rules before play begins.

The most important thing you can do before each session is to give each encounter the PCs are likely to reach a two-minute read. That should give you a basic familiarity with monster abilities and tactics and a sense of what other rules (often ones related to skills or terrain) will come into play.

It's also worth noting the things you won't need. Once characters reach 30th level, they're done as far as character advancement goes. You don't need to track or award experience points anymore. Just cross it off your to-do list.

Nor do you need to worry much about treasure. "Last Breath of the Dragon Queen" is a focused adventure, and the characters are under a time constraint: they must get to Tiamat before she rebuilds her network of defenders and allies. Furthermore, the campaign ends when this adventure does. Aside from that, killing the goddess of wealth, greed, and envy ushers in a world where wealth means a lot less. Combine the time constraint, the campaign's end, and the devaluation of wealth itself, and you find yourself running an adventure where acquired treasure doesn't mean anything. If the players receive vast wealth, they'll never have the opportunity to spend it.

Treat this unusual situation as an opportunity: Throw the treasure gates open wide! The characters will spend most of the adventure in the halls of the goddess of wealth, so it stands to reason that the place would be positively dripping with treasure. This is your chance to shower the heroes with it. If the PCs still want something specific for their characters, work it into the adventure early (the Treasure section below shows you how). Otherwise, go ahead and give them the proverbial moon. It does no harm and it will add extra resonance to the denouement, where the characters see the concept of material wealth itself taken down a peg or two.

Throughout the adventure, we've provided monetary treasure beyond the norm. Consider that a first step. This is the lair of the scariest dragon in the world, and she happens to be the goddess of wealth, so you can literally pave the hallways with gold and encrust every door handle with gems if you like. If the goddess of wealth can't afford such excess, who can?

Using Tactical Encounters

Each encounter includes several common elements, as described below.

Encounter Level

Each tactical encounter assumes a group of five player characters. All the encounters are 30th level—and some would be higher, if characters higher than 30th level existed. The final battle against Tiamat, for example, would be just another room in the dungeon . . . for theoretical 35th-level characters.

Until all characters reach 30th level and cease to care about experience points, a group earns the XP value noted with the encounter. This amount should be divided by the number of group members whether they've reached 30th level or not, with an equal amount awarded to each character. Be sure that everyone reaches 30th level by the end, however, because it would be a major disappointment to a player if everyone else's character achieved their epic destiny while you remained behind, 5,000 XP short.

Setup

This section of a tactical encounter provides you with the basic parameters of the encounter. It gives you a key to the monsters in the encounter so you can locate them on the tactical map, then provides context or background information. The map of each encounter area indicates where the monsters are located when the encounter begins. The setup section also describes what monsters are doing and how they react when the characters arrive.

Some encounters include monsters that are hidden or that do not appear until later in the fight. Do not place those monsters on the map unless at least one hero has succeeded on the Perception check to notice them, or when they enter combat.

Read-aloud Text

Read-aloud text provides information about what the characters can see and are aware of. You don't need to read it word for word. Feel free to paraphrase and use your own words, especially where read-aloud text is provided in a question-and-answer format. Use read-aloud text wisely. It is written for the most common approach to a particular situation, but the PCs' actions might require you to alter the information in any number of ways.

Monster Statistics

Encounters include statistics blocks for each monster type present in the encounter. If more than one monster of a particular kind is present, the statistics block indicates how many creatures are present.

Tactics

This entry describes special actions the monsters take to defeat the adventurers. Sometimes this means the monsters take advantage of special features of the area or make use of special powers or equipment. Tactics are an important part of both a monster's 'personality' and what makes an encounter challenging, so try to not back away from the monsters' tactics in order to soften the encounter.

Map

Each encounter includes a map keyed with the initial locations of each monster. The map also indicates the location of any special features of the area.

Features of the Area

This section describes special features of the map. If the location has items or areas of interest that the characters can interact with, those features are described. Look here to see whether a door is out of the ordinary, if an altar has a secret compartment, and the like.

Adapting the Adventure

Fighting Tiamat is a big deal. It's so big that we've intentionally built the entire adventure to build to that climax. While the events of "Last Breath of the Dragon Queen" are set in motion by the specifics of the Scales of War adventure path up to this point, it's straightforward to envision other paths that might put 30th-level heroes on Tiamat's doorstep.

As long as you can set up a believable reason why Tiamat is in her lair and without multiple layers of cultists, loyal dragons, and other worshippers to defend her, "Last Breath of the Dragon Queen" works without the specifics of the City of Brass siege and Bahamut's direct involvement. Most of the adaptation occurs in the adventure's introduction and aftermath. The chamber-by-chamber, session-by-session flow of the adventure can remain unchanged.

Because Tiamat is so vulnerable without a literal army of dragons to defend her, you can even run "Last Breath of the Dragon Queen" in worlds that use a different pantheon. Tiamat doesn't need to be a goddess for this adventure; she could merely (merely!) be a 35th-level dragon. In this case you'll want to scale down the adventure's aftermath, which deals with the impact of a deity's death, but the adventure itself can remain intact.

Treasure

As with previous installments of the Scales of War campaign, "The Last Breath of the Dragon Queen" makes use of the parcel system of treasure rewards as described in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. Because the campaign ends when this adventure does, all treasure is taken from remaining items on the players' wish lists. This is their last chance to pick up those rewards, after all. Tiamat is the goddess of greed, so there is a staggering amount of material wealth in her lair . . . and in the end, it's all just window dressing. At 30th level, the PCs are fundamentally beyond the game's ordinary economics, and it doesn't matter what they spend their vast treasure on after the adventure is over. If they succeed, they will have created a world without greed. Coins will still have value as a medium of exchange, but treasures won't be coveted the way they are in the traditional world of D&D (or the real world, for that matter).

Players wouldn't be players if they didn't want *something*, so the characters should accumulate ten treasure parcels by the end of the adventure. You can supply these treasures in whatever way you wish, but the following list presents the most likely encounters to bear treasure. During your preparation, assign parcels from those that follow to the encounters in the spaces provided.

Use the players' wish lists to come up with magic items for the first six parcels. Traditionally, DMs save the best treasures for the adventure's climax. Resist that urge; characters will never get a chance to actually use an item acquired after Tiamat's demise. Instead, load up the early parcels A–E with the good stuff, especially if one or more characters have fallen behind the curve gearwise.

Parcel A: _____
Death from Above (X1).

Parcel B: _____
Death from Above (X1).

Parcel C: _____
Hall of Vanquished Champions (G5).

Parcel D: _____
Hall of Vanquished Champions (G5).

Parcel E: _____
Audience chamber (G1).

Parcel F: _____
Audience chamber (G1).

Parcel G: _____
Green brood mother (G4).

Parcel H: _____
Observatory (G9).

Parcel I: _____
Blue brood mother (G10).

Parcel J: _____
Blue brood mother (G10).

At this point, we're beyond the guidelines in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. Any item regardless of level is just fine in any of the above parcels. Go nuts!

Conversation with Bahamut

The adventure starts in the City of Brass shortly after the events of "Test of Fire." After the characters have taken care of their immediate needs and had an extended rest, a silver dragon from Bahamat's personal retinue, Girithanian, finds them and invites them to an audience with Bahamut himself.

Girithanian takes you to the ramparts near the main gate to the City of Brass. All around is a storm of activity: efreet workers repairing walls, Bahamut's soldiers scurrying from errand to errand—and the air above you is positively thick with metallic dragons soaring and swooping.

Watching it all from an intact section of wall is a kindly old man with long white hair. He wears robes that appear to be made of liquid platinum, and orbiting him like a halo are seven yellow canaries.

"Hail, heroes," Bahamut intones. "Though the cost was high, together we've dealt the Dragon Queen a grievous blow. Yet she lurks in Tytherion, and Tiamat will certainly rise again. Unless . . .

"Unless you can perform one final deed for me, for our army, and indeed, for all those who reject evil."

Give the characters a chance to respond, make formal pledges of support, and so on. Keep in mind that despite his relatively ordinary appearance, Bahamut is a full-fledged god and always comports himself with a certain gravitas. When the heroes are ready to hear more, Bahamut favors them with a wry smile and continues.

"My draconic children favor elegant turns of phrase, but I'll be blunt: I want you to kill Tiamat. Not her aspect, not her avatar, but the deity herself. Too long has her evil spread through the universe. Too long have she and I fought each other to a standstill.

"I believe I can get you to the vicinity of her lair. And there is such power within you . . . If anyone can defeat Tiamat in lethal battle, it is you."

After a pause, Bahamut continues.

"As you know, I'm acutely aware of what it takes to kill a god. Among those who answered our call here in the City of Brass, no one matches your power. Look at the army you see before you. Other than you, no one here would be more than a momentary annoyance to Tiamat.

"Only a small group can reach Tiamat at this crucial moment. Her forces are in disarray, fleeing the Dragon Queen's wrath and fighting one another. She has lost control of most of her followers. But look at my army. It's in no shape to close ranks and march on Tytherion, either. It would take a miracle for us to recover, reorganize, and reequip for another battle.

"Miracles are what I do, but even if you assume that miracle, then you have a shining army marching on Tiamat's lair. And when we march, Tiamat's dispersed, distracted forces will have a common foe to unite against. You see where I'm leading this?"

Give the players a chance to follow Bahamut's reasoning. Then pick it up and restate the mission.

"I ask you to do what my army cannot—what I myself cannot. Meet my agent in Tytherion, travel to Tiamat's Lair, and slay her utterly. Her stronghold is being looted by her own rapacious dragons, and you should have little difficulty assailing what would otherwise be an impregnable fortress. Carve your way through what remains of Tiamat's guards however you must. Slay her on the spot—and let her know that the world will be better off for her demise."

The PCs will undoubtedly have questions at this point. Let the conversation flow naturally. Bahamut isn't holding anything back—he's clearly beyond that point now. For the first time in centuries, he genuinely believes that Tiamat's defeat is possible. The only thing Bahamut doesn't know is the exact disposition of Tiamat's remaining defenders.

Here are example answers to questions characters probably will ask.

Tytherion: *"I can send you to Tytherion to the general area of Tiamat's Lair. I do not know details of her demesne, the Caverns of Fiery Splendor. That's where Berath comes in."*

Berath/The Agent: *"Ah, Berath . . . a ghost who haunts the caverns of Tytherion and is as loyal to me beyond the grave as he was in life. He can guide you through the Caverns of Fiery Splendor and to the very gates of Tiamat's inner lair. I've contacted him, and he's expecting you to meet him at the main entrance to the Caverns of Fiery Splendor."*

Berath's History: *"Centuries ago, a paladin named Berath . . . one of my most beloved servants . . . grew weary of striving against the Dragon Queen's minions. He'd earned a little weariness after his hundredth dragon slain, I suppose. He gathered a host that almost rivaled the army we had here, and against my wishes led a crusade into the Caverns of Fiery Splendor. I wish I'd done more to stop him, but I could fault neither his ability nor his resolute purpose. Tiamat was well prepared against Berath's crusade, and none of the paladins under his banner escaped. I mourned Berath's loss—as did all who follow me—and relegated his crusade to a sad chapter of history.*

"But recently—perhaps because of Tiamat's current troubles—Berath's ghost contacted me. I see the doubt on your faces, but I'm sure it's him and he's still loyal. There are certain bonds between faithful worshipper and god that cannot be subverted. Berath took great joy when he learned that you would be finishing the job that he started."

Other Allies: *"As I said, even my most powerful dragons cannot match your power. And if they did, their presence would certainly draw every chromatic dragon from across the plane. In my divine wisdom, adding anyone else would attract attention without actually helping you kill Tiamat. With one exception . . .*

"As I ponder your question, something occurs to me. I'm going to do something I've never done before. Each of you, take one of these canaries. Just as I'm no ordinary old man, so too are these not ordinary canaries. The canaries will flitter about until you ask for their aid. Then one will transform into a gold dragon that will fight on your behalf for a minute or two—until the magic that transformed them draws them back to me."

Give each character a canary. It's a one-use item that does the following:

Bahamut's Golden Canary **Level 30**

These harmless-seeming canaries are gold dragons in disguise.

Wondrous Item priceless

Power (Consumable ✦ Summoning): Standard Action. A summoned Large gold dragon appears under your control in an unoccupied space within 20 squares. The dragon has speed 8, fly 10 (hover) and, unlike a typical summoned creature, has its own defenses and hit points (all defenses 34; hp 120). *Minor Action:* +27 vs. AC; 1d12 + 10 damage. *Opportunity Attack:* +27 vs. AC; 1d12 + 10 damage.

Bahamut Taking Part: *"Absolutely not. Suffice it to say that Tiamat and I have significant wards designed specifically for each other. For obvious reasons, I must be more careful when it comes to matters of . . . personal security, shall we say."*

Tiamat's True Death: *"It's possible that Tiamat has safeguarded against utter death much like I did, but it's unlikely. Suffice it to say that no one knows Tiamat's character better than I do, and such foresight isn't her style. She's adept—perhaps more adept than I—at coordinating multiple plans and improvising new evils on the spot. But the long play has never been her forté."*

Pay: *"For the death of my greatest foe . . . for the expunging of one of the world's great evils . . . for the slaying of a god? I'll throw open my treasure-houses to you. Take whatever and as much as you desire."*

Bahamut smirks as he says this, because he knows what Tiamat's death will mean for the very concept of wealth.

If the heroes want payment in advance, use the treasure guidelines in the Introduction. If some of the PCs are undergeared, then this is a good way to make sure they're ready for the tribulations awaiting. Go ahead and give any of the magic item treasures (taking them out of the encounters they'd otherwise appear in). As the treasure section indicates, feel free to bury the characters in material wealth such as coins and gems.

Tiamat's Defenses: *"Tiamat risked much when she came here, stripping her stronghold of most of its armed might. Few of those dragons survived the battle, much less returned to Tytherion. Of the remainder, we have reliable reports—including from Berath—that Tiamat's tendency of rule through fear and avarice doesn't work when her lackeys doubt her power and her ability to pay. Many simply fled, waiting to see which way the proverbial wind is blowing. Others used the crisis as an opportunity to settle old scores with one another, to advance in the ranks by killing their superiors, or simply to loot Tiamat's treasury. Because Tiamat is the goddess of greed, I imagine it's quite a treasury.*

"Undoubtedly there are those who remain loyal to Tiamat and those who cannot escape her watchful eyes. If they were numerous or powerful, we wouldn't be seeing this sort of upheaval among Tiamat's followers—upheaval that's spreading across all planes."

Retreat: *"If you need to make a tactical retreat, you can come back here or to a citadel of your choosing. Berath may have scouted out a temporary shelter. Do not tarry overlong before pressing onward, however. Every hour you delay is an hour Tiamat will use to marshal her remaining force and persuade her followers that she's as powerful as ever."*

Timing: *"If you must take time to prepare, so be it. You are uniquely suited to this task, and I can't call on anyone else with your potence. But know this: Each of Tiamat's five heads is whispering, threatening, browbeating, pleading, and bargaining with her far-flung followers and allies to come to her aid. The more you delay, the stronger she grows."*

Bahamut genuinely believes this, but even he has underestimated the disorder and fratricide in Tiamat's ranks. As long as the characters don't take a month off in the middle of the adventure (or something similarly foolish), Tiamat won't be able to persuade allies to defend her lair (at least not allies capable of stopping 30th-level heroes.)

Roleplaying Notes: Bahamut isn't a tragic figure in the classical sense, but there's an ironic twist here that wouldn't be out of place in Greek tragedy. Bahamut is the only god who has recently died—fundamentally killed by mortals, and yet now he's enthusiastically exhorting some mortals to do the same thing to another god. Tiamat is an evil god and Bahamut's most bitter rival, to be sure. But if you think the players at your table would appreciate it, try to portray Bahamut as somewhat conflicted, torn between his desire to expunge Tiamat's evil in the world while chastened a bit that he's resorting to such measures.

Preparations

The PCs can make whatever last-minute purchases they want in the City of Brass before departing. Because the city suffered during the siege and subsequent battle, you're within your rights to limit what they can purchase for their trip. But, as noted in the Treasure section of the introduction, you can have a free hand with available wealth.

One other event occurs before the characters head to Tytherion: a visit from a mysterious stranger. An ordinary efreet (or someone else if you have a specific NPC you'd like to re-use) delivers a short, anonymous letter to the heroes. It states:

Dear Liberators of Bahamut,

Even those who do not march under Bahamut's flag support you in your future aims. Should you meet a solitary black figure in your upcoming journey, uttering the word "Chuhirimasté" will earn you friendship and aid along the way.

—An Ally of Convenience

The efreet will say (and divinations will confirm) that a yuan-ti gave him the letter and a thousand gold coins, with instructions to keep the money and deliver the letter.

The letter is from agents of Zehir. The "solitary black figure" mentioned is Theel, whom the characters will meet at the entrance to Tiamat's Lair.

The Old Man with the Canaries **Level 36 Solo Soldier (Leader)**
Medium immortal humanoid XP 0

Initiative +26 **Senses** Perception +32
HP 1,645; **Bloodied** 822; see also *discorporation*
AC 52; **Fortitude** 47, **Reflex** 45, **Will** 47
Resist 20 cold, 20 fire
Saving Throws +5; whenever an attack causes an effect on Bahamut that a save can end, he immediately makes a saving throw. Bahamut also makes saving throws at the end of his turn as normal.
Speed 8, teleport 5
Action Points 2

Unarmed Attack (standard, at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+41 vs. AC; 1d12 + 20 damage, and the target is dazed until the end of its next turn.

Gold Dragon Rescue (standard, uses one canary)
Area burst 1 within 30, centered on ally; +41 vs. AC; the target is stunned (save ends). *Effect:* The ally in the origin square gains fly 10 until the end of its next turn.

Summon Gold Dragon (standard, uses one canary) ✦ **Summoning**
Ranged 20; Bahamut summons a Large gold dragon in an unoccupied space within range. The dragon has speed 8, fly 10 (hover) and, unlike a typical summoned creature, has its own defenses and hit points (all defenses 34; hp 120). *Minor Action:* +27 vs. AC; 1d12 + 10 damage. *Opportunity Attack:* +27 vs. AC; 1d12 + 10 damage.

Bahamut's Blessing (standard; at-will)
Ranged 30; two targets; each target gains a +10 bonus to attack rolls, a +10 bonus to skill checks, and a +10 bonus to damage rolls.

Bahamut's Cleansing (minor; at-will)
Ranged 30; two targets; each target can end one effect a save can end.

Bahamut's Mercy (minor; at-will) ✦ **Healing**
Ranged 30; two targets; each target can spend a healing surge and regain an additional 25 hit points.

Bahamut Runs Rampant (standard; encounter) ✦ **Polymorph**
Bahamut assumes his draconic form (see Bahamut).

Seven Canaries
Bahamut has seven trained canaries which he can transform into gold dragons. Some of his powers expend these canaries. All the canaries return during a short rest.

Discorporation (when bloodied)
When Bahamut becomes bloodied, he discorporates and is unable to take physical form for a time.

Alignment Lawful Good **Languages** Supernal
Skills Arcana +31, Athletics +33, Diplomacy +32, Endurance +34, Heal +32, History +31, Insight +32, Intimidate +32, Religion +31

Str 31 (+28)	**Dex** 23 (+24)	**Wis** 28 (+27)
Con 33 (+29)	**Int** 27 (+26)	**Cha** 29 (+27)

Equipment: robe

Description: When he's not holding court in his shining castle, Bahamut walks the natural world in the most unassuming of disguises: an elderly man accompanied by seven trained canaries. This old man, variously called a sage or a hermit in folklore, travels from place to place with no apparent purpose. He's quick to offer advice, information, or assistance to other travelers. One folk tale in particular is told with a hundred variations: The sage with the canaries shares a campfire with roadside travelers, offering mysterious advice that borders on prophecy. Still, the travelers would have regarded the old man as nothing more than a curiosity if it weren't for the monsters that attacked the camp. Imagine their surprise when the old man started throwing around unfathomably powerful magic and turning his canaries into gold dragons.

Departure

When the PCs are ready, Bahamut directs Girithanian to perform a Planar Portal ritual to send them to Tytherion. Through the portal, the characters see:

Girithanian completes the ritual, and you see, shimmering through the portal, a rocky desert with red-limned volcanic peaks in the distance. You cannot make out size or color through the haze, but you can see distinctly draconic silhouettes in the sky.

When the characters step through the portal, they arrive in Tytherion and trigger the "Death from Above" encounter (page 17).

Arriving in Tytherion

Girithanian sends the heroes to a portal circle near the main entrance to Tiamat's main fortress, one of the few artificial structures in the lowland region of Azharul. The terrain is a volcanic moonscape devoid of vegetation, with only pockmarked craters and sluggish rivers of lava scattered across its surface. The PCs arrive at twilight—because it's always twilight in Tytherion.

Amid the rubble of this volcanic wasteland are five immense towers that stretch to the sky. They're arranged in a ring and connected by a high ridge with one gap cut in it—clearly the intended entrance. Above the towers, dragons are soaring. As you watch, a large red dragon claws at a blue dragon, and they tussle in midair while plummeting earthward. Looking closer at the towers, you can see crumbling edifices and other signs of recent battle. The towers are about a mile away.

As the characters approach the towers, they see more evidence of chaos in Tiamat's realm: dragons, humanoid soldiers, and other followers of Tiamat fleeing the fortress, many burdened with loot from the Dragon Queen's treasuries. Furthermore, the volcanic plain between the characters and the towers is strewn with wrecked wagons, dragon carcasses, and other evidence of conflict and retreat.

While there are many dragons and other monsters about, there's almost no one capable of threatening the heroes. If the players seem keen to start a fight (whether to capture a prisoner for questioning or just because), feel free to handle it with a brief narration or just declare them the victors. A battle between the PCs and the high-paragon/low-epic opposition here isn't a battle that needs to be played out in round-by-round detail.

Nor do any prisoners even try to keep what secrets they know from the characters. They're a frightened, demoralized lot. Any of the dragons or other refugees from Tiamat's domain know that the defenses are in such disarray as to be nonexistent. As for the Dragon Queen herself, she's holed up in her inner lair somewhere within the Caverns of Fiery Splendor, but she hasn't emerged or communicated with them in days. The prisoners can, if coerced, draw a sketchy map of the Caverns of Fiery Splendor that bears some resemblance to reality, but none of them know where Tiamat's lair is within it.

Bypassing Travel

Once the characters are in Tytherion, they may wish to use a True Portal ritual or similar magic to teleport right to Tiamat. Let 'em. They'll skip the Death From Above encounter and miss meeting Berath and Theel, but Tiamat herself is protected by a 35th-level Forbiddance ritual that covers all but the 10 feet closest to the floor in the fountain chamber. The heroes arrive on the border of the forbiddance zone near the fountain, and they'll have to deal with the dragon-eye disintegrators without Theel's warning.

Death From Above

As the PCs get within a quarter-mile or so of the five great towers, they encounter the one denizen of the area that's actually a threat: Azharul Dominion ships. Each ship is a conveyance crewed by dragonborn sailors, but it's easiest to treat them as creatures in their own right.

After that encounter, Berath manifests and makes his presence known to the characters.

The Five Great Towers

Each tower encompasses hundreds of thousands of square feet . . . all of it thoroughly sacked. Delving into it room by room is a waste of time for everyone at your table, so quickly describe extensive armories, smithies, arsenals, and barracks within each tower. Corpses—mostly of dragons and dragonborn warriors—are strewn throughout.

Meeting Berath

Once the characters have dispatched the Azharul Dominion ships, Berath appears before the heroes.

There's a momentary shimmer in the air, and the translucent form of a ghostly human in battered plate armor and a dragon-helm appears. "I am Berath," it says, "and your coming was foretold by no less than a vision from the Platinum Dragon himself. Together, let us complete the holiest of all crusades! Onward!"

The PCs will probably engage Berath in conversation at this point. He's eager to get moving, but he's even more eager to win the characters' trust and maximize their chances against Tiamat. During the conversation, Berath tells the tale of his crusade and describes his soldiers whittled down by ambush after ambush within the Caverns of Fiery Splendor. At Berath's last stand, a small side cavern was nearly covered by a collapsing wall and now would make a disguised base for the characters—especially if they inscribe a portal circle there.

Berath can take the heroes to the beginning of the tunnel that leads directly to the fountain chamber, but he's never been inside—because he can't go inside. In some cosmic sense, he won't let himself do as a ghost what he could not accomplish in life.

There's little more than this that Berath can do. He cannot interact with the world other than by speaking and making himself visible; no picking objects up, attacking monsters, etc. The reverse is also true: Berath can't be targeted by creatures and can't be harmed by anything. He's not undead or even a creature, really. He's a ghost in the classic sense of the word, clinging to some vague, spiritual existence only because of the enormity of his sacrifice and his close connection to Bahamut. Berath cannot abide proximity to evil creatures, and he disappears when they're near. Thus he can't be present during a battle, nor can he scout ahead very well.

Expanding Berath: As written, Berath is just a basic guide for the characters. He offers a safe hideout and provides directions to Tiamat's Lair. If you think your table wants a deeper interaction with Berath, feel free to expand his role in the adventure. It might take a skill challenge (using the rules described in *Dungeon Master's Guide 2*) to win Berath's trust. As you portray Berath, emphasize the horrors he endured watching his crusade collapse within the caverns and suggest that he may no longer be entirely sane. If the players take a liking to Berath, you can even ignore the "Berath can't go inside Tiamat's Lair" restriction and let him commiserate with the characters and applaud their efforts throughout the adventure. Don't let him be brought back to life, however; Berath is most effective as a tragic figure.

Getting Through the Caverns of Fiery Splendor

The Caverns of Fiery Splendor aren't empty, but they're certainly devoid of creatures that pose a challenge for 30th-level heroes. Periodically describe high-paragon and low-epic dragons and other denizens in the tunnels, and ask the players whether they intend to fight it out, ignore, or slip past the monsters. Then describe the characters succeeding at those efforts. Time at the gaming table is too precious to waste on encounters whose outcome is foregone.

"Last Breath of the Dragon Queen" is all about Tiamat's lair itself, but the Caverns of Fiery Splendor are also home to other points of interest described (in April, when the book will be published) in *The Plane Above*: wandering darksworn and adamantine doors that imprison the souls of chromatic dragons who had the temerity to worship other gods. The characters ultimately have more important business in this adventure, but a future campaign may bring your players (if not their existing heroes) back to the Caverns of Fiery Splendor.

As described in the Bypassing Travel section above, a True Portal ritual can bypass all the travel (and the chance to meet Theel). Berath can pass through the portal the same as anyone else. If the PCs choose this route, just move ahead to the Fountain Chamber.

Finding Theel

Theel, an ebony-scaled yuan-ti spy, is hiding (Stealth +29) near the entrance to the tunnel that leads to the fountain chamber. She'll reveal herself to anyone not obviously working for Tiamat, relying on her *viper strike* to turn invisible and escape if necessary. If she hears the characters give the password ("Chuhiri-masté"), Theel bows and says, "Let's get you inside so you can confront the Dragon Queen."

Theel is willing to converse with the characters, but as a spy, she has an intense dislike for being out in the open and instinctively doesn't say more than she must. If pressed, she'll admit that she works for Zehir. She'll even speculate on Zehir's motives—a wounded or dead Tiamat would let Zehir expand his territory here in Tytherion. (The Tiamat/Zehir "turf war" in Tytherion is known to any hero who succeeds at a DC 25 Religion check.)

Theel hasn't been beyond the fountain chamber, but she can warn PCs that disintegration beams emerge from the eyes of the dragon-head doorways. Furthermore, she suggests that the magic of each dragon head is tied to whatever lives beyond the doorway—and whatever that is, it isn't Tiamat herself, because she's on a platform floating above the fountain chamber.

"The disintegtratorsssss . . . are potent indeed. They nearly sssslew me in a flash when I tried tampering with them. But my ressssearch indicates that if you slay whatever lays beyond each dragon-mouth, it'll disssssable the dragon-eyessssss."

Theel also has an illusion-hidden cave nearby that the characters can use as a base if they wish. It has a portal circle inscribed within it.

Theel won't willingly fight at the characters' sides, forcefully reminding them if necessary that she is a spy, not an assassin. Her orders are to provide information to the heroes, then watch the fireworks and report back to Zehir's exarchs on what happens.

Expanding Theel: Theel is as evil as they come, and your table may decide to ignore or fight her. That's fine—they can figure out how the disintegrator beams work on their own. Theel isn't exactly thrilled about her current assignment, which requires

her to a) expose herself to danger, and b) work with her natural enemies. If you think your group would enjoy it, you can expand the interaction with Theel to encompass a skill challenge to earn her trust or otherwise extract her aid.

Berath and Theel definitely do not form a mutual admiration society. As long as the players are engaged in the middle of the conversation, don't be shy about portraying the contempt the paladin ghost and the yuan-ti spy feel for each other.

Theel	**Level 28 Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid, yuan-ti (reptile)	XP 13,000
Initiative +26	**Senses** Perception +23
HP 254; **Bloodied** 127	
AC 42 (44); **Fortitude** 39 (41), **Reflex** 41 (43), **Will** 35 (37)	
Resist poison 20	
Speed 7 (9); see also *slither away*	
Falchion (standard, at-will) ✦ **Poison, Weapon**	
+33 vs. AC; 2d4 + 7 damage, and ongoing 10 poison damage (save ends).	
Longbow (standard, at-will) ✦ **Poison, Weapon**	
Ranged 20/40; +33 vs. AC; 1d10 + 10 damage, and ongoing 10 poison damage (save ends).	
Sudden Strike (standard, recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Weapon**	
Theel can move up to 7 squares and attack; +33 vs. AC; 4d4 + 7 damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).	
Viper Strike (standard, at-will) ✦ **Illusion, Weapon**	
+31 vs. Will; 6d4 + 7 damage, and Theel becomes invisible and can shift 2 squares. Theel remains invisible until the start of her next turn. *Miss:* The target takes half damage, and Theel shifts 1 square, but does not turn invisible.	
Slither Away	
While bloodied, Theel gains +2 speed and a +2 bonus to all defenses.	
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Common, Draconic
Skills Bluff +21, Dungeoneering +23, Insight +23, Perception +23, Stealth +29, Thievery +29	
Str 24 (+21)	**Dex** 30 (+24) **Wis** 16 (+17)
Con 22 (+20)	**Int** 18 (+18) **Cha** 14 (+16)
Equipment: arrow x20, falchion, leather armor, longbow	

01: Death from Above

Encounter Level 29 (78,000 XP)

Setup

3 Azharul dominion ships (D)

This encounter serves as something of a warm-up for the PCs, and it presents them with an unusual foe: flying war galleys that function like individual creatures.

When the characters are a quarter-mile from the entrance to the Caverns of Fiery Splendor, read:
Emerging from the twilight skies above you are three sailing ships. Lightning coruscates around their hulls. Each one has a bulbous projector of some sort on its prow, just below where its figurehead would be. They swoop toward you, and you can make out sailors—dragonborn, perhaps?—manning ballistae on the deck.

Perception Check

DC 25: *There is no doubt that the sailors are dragonborn.*

Religion Check

DC 30: *These are Azharul dominion ships—elite guardians of Tiamat's part of Tytherion.*

This encounter is unusual in that it takes a conveyance crewed by low-level sailors and treats it as a creature for the purposes of combat. Doing so is both easier and more satisfying than slaughtering dozens of minions in cramped ship quarters. It requires a certain mental flexibility on everyone's part to accept the abstraction that ships can be treated as creatures. The dominion ships' collective operation and crew suppression abilities should cover most common interactions between the characters and the crew directly, but let your common sense—and your sense of fun—rule the day.

Your descriptions of the battle are key to making the encounter work. As you describe each hit, consider whether it makes more sense for the "damage" to be depicted as against the crew or the ship itself. An archer launching volleys of arrows upward? You might say, "one of your arrows hits a dragonborn holding a map—perhaps a navigator—and he falls screaming to his doom." A Black Fire attack from the wizard, on the other hand, might be described as "the hull is deeply scorched by your magic, and much of the rigging catches ablaze."

Tactics

The dominion ships' captains are not subtle. They prefer to simply hover over their enemies and bombard them with the thunder-echo projector. If the heroes fly up and engage a dominion ship in melee, the other dominion ships move far away (at least 20 squares and maybe the full 40) and attack the melee combatants with their projectors. The ships are immune to thunder damage, so they don't need to worry about friendly fire.

3 Azharul Dominion Ships **Level 28 Elite Artillery**
Gargantuan natural animate (construct) XP 26,000 each

Initiative +24 **Senses** Perception +19
Hissing Corona (Lightning) aura 4; any creature that enters the aura or starts its turn there takes 10 lightning damage.
HP 394; **Bloodied** 197
AC 40; **Fortitude** 40, **Reflex** 42, **Will** 38
Immune thunder; immune poison, disease, psychic, charm, fear (melee and ranged only; see *Collective Operation* below)
Saving Throws +2
Speed fly 10 (hover)
Action Points 1

⊕ **Dragonborn Marines on Deck** (minor 1/round, at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+33 vs. AC; 3d8 + 6 damage.

⊗ **Thunder-Echo Projectors** (standard, at-will) ✦ **Thunder**
Ranged 20/40; +35 vs. AC; 3d6 + 10 thunder damage.
Effect: The thunder projector makes a secondary attack against every other creature within 5 squares of the primary target, originating the attack from the primary target: ranged 10; +33 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 10 thunder damage.

Collective Operation
The dominion ship is operated by multiple dragonborn crew, and attacking or controlling them individually doesn't hamper the ship. The ship is subject to close and area attacks normally, but ranged and melee attacks with the poison, disease, psychic, charm, or fear keywords don't harm the dominion ship.

Crew Suppression
A creature adjacent to the dominion ship can spend a standard action to attack the visible crew members. They don't fight back; such an "attack" automatically succeeds. It does no damage but leaves the dominion ship unable to make its melee attack (save ends). If the same creature performs the crew suppression attack three rounds in a row, the thunder-echo projectors are likewise unable to attack (save ends).

Alignment Evil **Languages** Draconic (crew)
Str 27 (+22) **Dex** 30 (+24) **Wis** 20 (+19)
Con 23 (+20) **Int** 14 (+16) **Cha** 22 (+20)

Features of the Area

Illumination: This cavern has only the illumination the PCs bring with them.

Towers: These provide superior cover, but they automatically take damage whenever someone within 5 squares gets hit with a *thunder-echo projector*. They collapse when they've taken 50 damage, dealing 5d10 damage to anyone inside them. Those squares are then filled with rubble and count as difficult terrain.

Crenellated Walls: Provide cover, except from dominion ships overhead and less than 5 squares away horizontally. Like the towers, the walls are vulnerable to the *thunder-echo projector*. Each square of wall crumbles and collapses when it takes 25 thunder damage. This doesn't damage adjacent creatures, but it eliminates the cover and renders that square difficult terrain.

Cliffs: 30 feet high; Athletics DC 25 to climb.

Crater: Difficult terrain inside the crater. The craters provide cover, except from dominion ships overhead and less than 5 squares away horizontally.

Dragon Carcass: Difficult terrain.

Fountain Chamber

When the characters reach the entrance to Tiamat's Lair, Berath goes no further, wishes them well with tears in his eyes, and disappears. Theel slithers forward and leads the characters about a quarter-mile down a wide, winding tunnel to the fountain chamber.

You find yourself at the bottom of a tall chamber lit by a perpetual geyser of magma that streams upward several hundred feet. At its top is a metallic platform, floating near the roof of the chamber but not touching the sides—almost as if it is buoyed and held aloft by the magma fountain.

Around the chamber are five immense dragons, each as large as a barn, carved in relief along the lower perimeter of the chamber. Each has open jaws that serve as a doorway to a tunnel sloping downward. The eyes of each dragon glow, casting soft beams of light that dance across the chamber walls like searchlights in the night sky.

Perception Check

DC 23: *The muttering is a low female voice. You can't make out words but it sounds angry.*

DC 33 (and hero speaks Draconic): *You can make out bits of speech in Draconic. You hear the voice say, "You've crossed me for the last time, mortal . . ." A few minutes later, you hear "call it an alliance of convenience . . . " and " . . . think of the current disorder as an opportunity . . . "*

Arcana Check

DC 23: *It's clear that a powerful Forbiddance ritual—one more powerful than mortals can accomplish—covers most of this chamber.*

The Trap

The dragon-eye disintegrator beams intentionally go far beyond an ordinary trap—even an ordinary trap for 30th-level characters. Its intent is simple: render any PC it hits incapable of a sustained battle afterward without significant aid, so that the characters don't entirely bypass the rest of the adventure and tackle Tiamat straightaway. They can do so if they wish, of course, but they'll go into battle battered and bruised. Especially if Theel or one of the brood mothers explains it, the characters will realize they need to defeat all five brood mothers to ascend to Tiamat's platform.

Nor can the disintegrators be evaded or overwhelmed. They pierce the magma fountain and strike heroes on the other side, and they shoot quickly enough to attack every character who ascends, whether it's one or many.

The disintegrator beams take magic from the brood queens, but they do so in a manner more like hydraulics than electrical circuitry. Shutting down

just some of the dragon heads (by killing the relevant brood queen) doesn't diminish the potency of the disintegrators. There's just as much magic, even if it's going through fewer apertures. The PCs must disable all five dragon heads to shut down the disintegrators.

If the characters aren't getting it, deal the damage from the disintegrators and let them fight Tiamat for a while on the platform. Characters might die as a result, but 30th-level characters have the means to resurrect themselves. Think of that early battle as an appetizer. Heroes who've been abused by the disintegrators and then Tiamat will certainly try their luck with the brood mothers at that point, and they'll be scheming payback tactics the whole time. That's satisfying drama for you.

The Forbiddance Ward

Tiamat has cast the Forbiddance ritual (at her level, 35th) so it covers the entire chamber except for the bottom 10 feet. She wanted her followers to be able to teleport to her vicinity, after all. Any attempt to scry on Tiamat fails, and any attempt to teleport into the chamber results in the creature appearing on the chamber's floor.

Once PCs are within the forbiddance zone, they can teleport within it. Only teleporting from outside the zone is prohibited. Characters can climb the walls or fly up 10 feet, suffer a barrage from the disintegrators, then teleport the rest of the way if they have the means.

Getting Tiamat's Attention

Tiamat is a goddess, she's not entirely herself at the moment, and she's desperately trying to reestablish some sort of organization among her followers. She's so busy contacting her high priests, powerful dragons, and other allies that she'll ignore shouts, threats, and insults from the characters. If the heroes get clever and send some sort of message skyward, Tiamat obliterates it, cackles, and continues her rebuilding efforts. Only the actual presence of enemies on the platform gets her attention.

Dragon-Eye Disintegrator Beams Level 30 Solo Blaster
Hazard 95,000 XP

A white spotlight-beam emerges from the eyes of each dragon, transfixing each flying creature in the room.

Hazard: Every creature who moves higher than 10 feet above the floor of the fountain chamber gets hit by disintegrator beams.

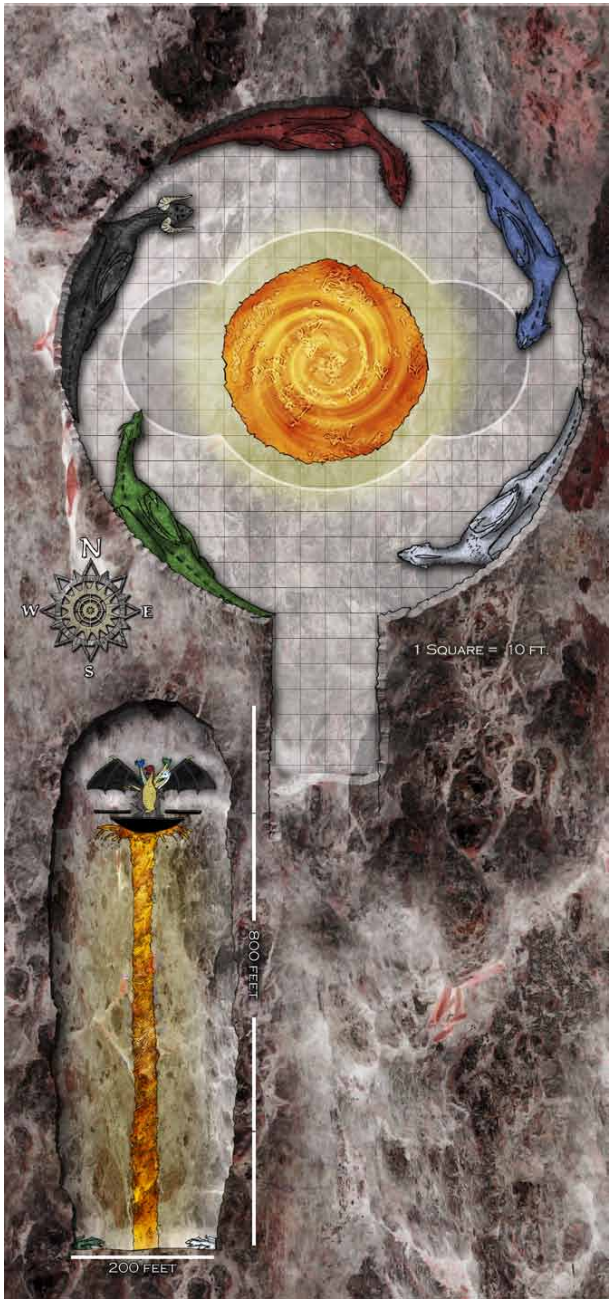
Perception
✦ No check is required to see the glowing eyes on each dragon-head entrance.

Arcana
✦ DC 30: The eye-beams will disintegrate anything that flies upward toward Tiamat's platform.
✦ DC 35: Tampering with the eye-beams may trigger them, but they draw energy from a powerful life-force beyond the dragon-doors.

Trigger
When a creature moves into or starts its turn in a square more than 10 feet above the floor.

Attack
Opportunity Action **Ranged** 150
Target: Every creature in range within the forbiddance zone other than Tiamat.
Attack: +40 vs. Reflex
Hit: 10d10 + 100 damage and 3d6 healing surges. A creature reduced to 0 hit points by the disintegrator's damage is destroyed; it has been reduced to a pile of fine gray dust.

Countermeasures
✦ Killing all five brood mothers disables the disintegrator beams.
✦ Four successes at a DC 40 Arcana or Thievery check disables one dragon-head disintegrator, but each attempt, successful or not, triggers the beams against every creature in the chamber except Tiamat, including those on the ground.



G1: Audience Chamber

Encounter Level 30 (103,000 XP)

Setup

Quanathrik, exarch of Tiamat (Q)
1 dread wraith assassin (D)
Shard of annihilation trap

Tiamat's advisors and occasionally the Dragon Queen herself would hold formal audiences with visiting dignitaries in this chamber. It was also home to ceremonies where Tiamat would anoint a new champion, consort, or exarch. Traitors to Tiamat's cause were often chained to the center of the mosaic, then publicly executed with the shard of annihilation.

When the characters reach the entrance to the chamber, read:

This richly appointed room has a mosaic done in black pearl winding a serpentine pattern across the white marble floor. To the right and left are balconies—one with pews and the other a bare platform. There are two sets of double doors at the far end of the room and a dais in the center that glitters with gold and platinum coins scattered across it.

A dragonborn in finely embroidered purple robes stands at the far end of the mosaic, just at the edge of the dais.

Perception Check
DC 23: *There has to be a small fortune in coins on that dais—thousands of coins.*

This encounter builds slowly. At first there's just Quanathrik in his dragonborn form. In the second round, the shard of annihilation will start moving along the mosaic. In the third and fourth rounds, the dread wraith assassin will reveal itself and the characters will realize that Quanathrik is more than just a dragonborn in a fancy robe.

Tactics

Only Quanathrik is visible at the start of the fight. In the first round, he moves into the mosaic area and says, "Behold the shard of annihilation!" The shard appears at the end of that round (initiative 0) and starts working its way along its path. (Be sure Quanathrik is not in a spot where he could be hit by the shard's first move.)

The shard of annihilation is part of the fun for this encounter, so try to keep either Quanathrik or the dread wraith assassin near the mosaic at all times, even if it would make tactical sense for them to both retreat to the balconies. Both need not be there, but at least one of them should be.

Quanathrik: Quanathrik is built on an ancient blue dragon chassis, and in this adventure you'll get plenty of practice running powerful dragons. The interesting aspect of the monster is flipping back and forth between gargantuan dragon and medium creature. Time the "big reveal"—Quanathrik becoming a full-fledged dragon—for maximum impact. In dragonborn form, Quanathrik can hurl lightning and teleport away every round, and that's reasonable danger output, especially if he's biding his time while his breath weapon recharges.

In dragon form, Quanathrik has a push along with his *gore* attack—just the thing for pushing heroes into the shard of annihilation.

Dread Wraith Assassin: In about the third round, Quanathrik cries out, "Servant of the Raven Queen, we call out to you. Honor the gift your mistress gave!" This brings the dread wraith assassin into play. With Stealth +29, you need only dim the lights a little at first. Have the dread wraith go after PCs who are trying to stay away from Quanathrik.

Shard of Annihilation: As described in the trap section below, the shard follows the mosaic path on the floor. If it reaches the end of the path while the battle is still raging, you have a choice. You can have it wink out of existence entirely, or blink back to the start of the path, or reverse direction . . . or you can have it break free from its path and make a beeline for the nearest creature, something it's never done before and a great surprise to Quanathrik. Let your sense of pacing and drama decide which is right for you.

Dread Wraith Assassin	**Level 31 Lurker**
Large shadow humanoid (undead)	XP 23,000
Initiative +28	**Senses** Perception +21; darkvision
Shroud of Night (Necrotic) aura 5; bright light in the aura is reduced to dim light, and dim light becomes darkness.	
HP 206; **Bloodied** 103	
Regeneration 20 (if the dread wraith lord takes radiant damage, regeneration is negated until the end of the wraith's next turn)	
AC 45; **Fortitude** 41, **Reflex** 43, **Will** 43	
Immune disease, fear, poison; **Resist** 30 necrotic, insubstantial; **Vulnerable** 20 radiant (see also *regeneration*)	
Speed fly 10 (hover); phasing	
⊕ **Dread Blade** (standard, at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**	
Reach 2; +34 vs. Reflex; 2d10 + 10 necrotic damage, and the target is weakened (save ends).	
✧ **Death Shriek** (when reduced to 0 hit points) ✦ **Psychic**	
Close blast 3; targets enemies; +32 vs. Will; 4d8 + 10 psychic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends). *Miss:* Half damage.	
Combat Advantage ✦ **Necrotic**	
The dread wraith assassin deals 4d6 extra necrotic damage against any target it has combat advantage against.	
Shadow Glide (move; encounter)	
The dread wraith assassin shifts 6 squares.	
Spawn Wraith	
Any humanoid killed by a dread wraith assassin rises as a free-willed dread wraith at the start of its creator's next turn, appearing in the space where it died (or in the nearest unoccupied space). Raising the slain creature (using the Raise Dead ritual) does not destroy the spawned wraith.	
Alignment Chaotic Evil	**Languages** Common
Skills Stealth +29	
Str 24 (+22)	**Dex** 28 (+24)	**Wis** 12 (+16)
Con 20 (+20)	**Int** 14 (+17)	**Cha** 28 (+24)

Features of the Area

Illumination: This cavern has only the illumination the characters bring with them.

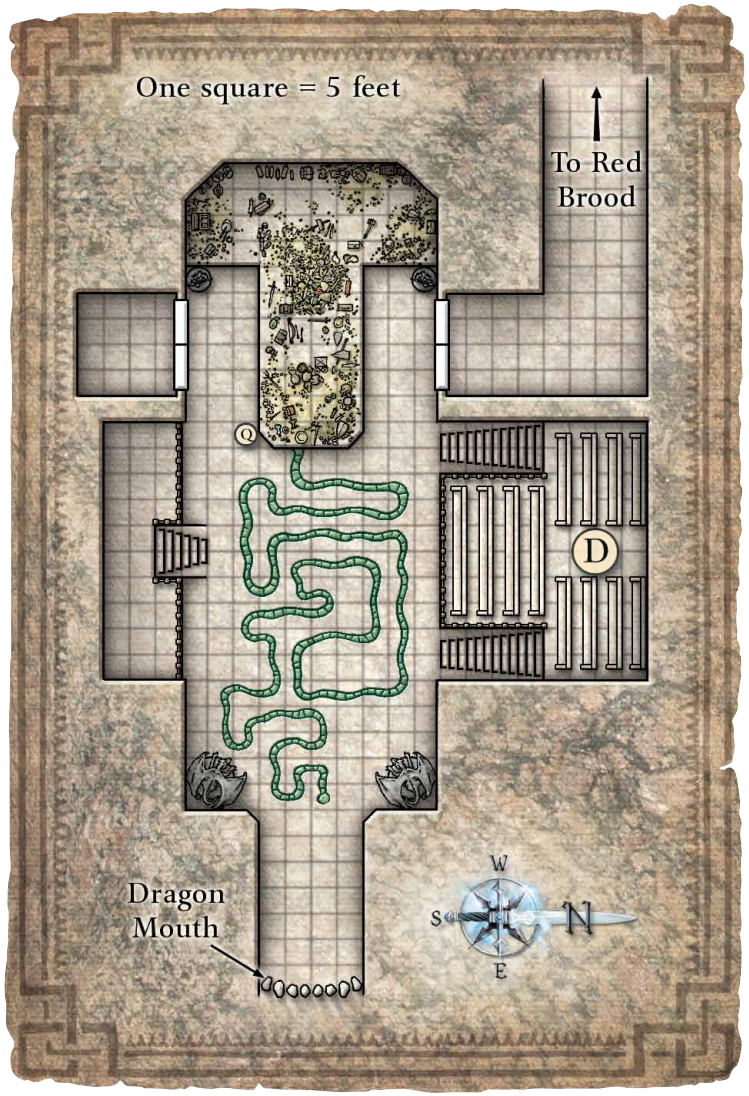
Ceiling: The ceiling of the cavern is 40 feet high, placing it 20 feet above the balconies.

Northwest Alcove: These double doors are barred on the inside, which should give the players pause. If unbarred and opened, the door releases a cascade of gems—the room was full to the brim with them. Any character standing in the 12 squares immediately between the doors and the dais is harmlessly knocked prone. The gems, which are predominantly rubies, emeralds, diamonds, sapphires, and black pearls, are collectively worth 5 million gp. It will take one person 45 minutes to gather them up. See the treasure section at the beginning of the adventure for an explanation of this adventure's unusual treasure placement.

Dais: This platform is covered with treasure, specifically 500,000 gp in equal portions of gold, silver, and platinum, plus treasure parcels A and F. The entire platform is difficult terrain.

Statues: The statues have no special effect. They are 10 feet tall and can be scaled with a DC 15 Athletics check.

Floor Mosaic: The mosaic is inlaid gems. The sphere of annihilation follows its path. Other than that, the mosaic has no effect. The gems can't be pried from the floor without ruining them.



Quanathrik, Exarch of TiamatLevel 28 Solo Artillery
Gargantuan natural magical beast (dragon) XP 65,000

Initiative +18
Senses Perception +23; darkvision
HP 1,290; **Bloodied** 645
AC 42; **Fortitude** 46, **Reflex** 40, **Will** 40
Resist 30 lightning
Saving Throws +5
Speed 10, fly 12 (hover)
Action Points 2

Gore (standard, at-will) ✦ **Lightning**
Reach 4; +34 vs. AC; 2d8 + 10 plus 2d6 lightning damage, and the target is pushed 3 squares and knocked prone.

Claw (standard, at-will)
Reach 4; +32 vs. AC; 2d6 + 10 damage.

Draconic Fury (standard, at-will)
The dragon makes a *gore* attack and two *claw* attacks.

Lightning Reformation (move, available whenever breath weapon isn't available) ✦ **Teleportation, Polymorph**
The dragon teleports up to 12 squares and takes the form of a medium dragonborn. He can regain his gargantuan dragon form as a minor action. While in dragonborn form, he cannot use his *breath weapon*, *frightful presence*, or *thunderclap*, and his *gore* and *claw* attacks become Reach 1.

Breath Weapon (standard, recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Lightning**
The dragon targets up to three creatures with its lightning breath; the first target must be within 20 squares of the dragon, the second target within 10 squares of the first, and the third target within 10 squares of the second; +34 vs. Reflex; 3d12 + 22 lightning damage. *Miss:* Half damage. This attack does not provoke opportunity attacks.

Hurl Lightning (standard, available only in dragonborn form) ✦ **Lightning**
Ranged 20; +34 vs. Reflex; 2d12 + 22 lightning damage. This attack does not provoke opportunity attacks.

Frightful Presence (standard, encounter) ✦ **Fear**
Close burst 10; targets enemies; +34 vs. Will; the target is stunned until the end of the dragon's next turn. *Aftereffect:* The target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends).

Thunderclap (standard, at-will) ✦ **Thunder**
Close burst 3; +34 vs. Fortitude; 2d10 + 8 thunder damage, and the target is stunned until the end of the blue dragon's next turn. *Critical Hit:* As above, except that the target is stunned (save ends).

Lightning Burst (standard, at-will) ✦ **Lightning**
Area burst 4 within 20; +34 vs. Reflex; 5d6 + 8 lightning damage. *Miss:* Half damage.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Draconic
Skills Arcana +22, Athletics +34, Diplomacy +22, Insight +23, Nature +23, Religion +23

Str 31 (+24)	**Dex** 19 (+18)	**Wis** 18 (+18)
Con 26 (+22)	**Int** 17 (+17)	**Cha** 17 (+17)

Shard of Annihilation **Level 29 Lurker**
Hazard XP 15,000

A shard of impenetrable blackness floats along a path inscribed on the floor, leaving black motes of energy in its wake.

Hazard: The shard of pure blackness fills one square but doesn't provide cover or block movement.

Perception
✦ No check is required to see the shard.

Arcana
✦ DC 34: The character recognizes the shard's nature and that it's similar to a sphere of annihilation.

Trigger
When a creature enters any of the squares covered by the mosaic, the shard appears at initiative point 0 that round. Every round it moves 1d6 + 4 squares, attacking everyone whose space it enters.

Attack
Opportunity Action **Melee** 0
Target: One creature
Attack: +32 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 6d6 + 10 damage and ongoing 15 damage (save ends). A creature reduced to 0 hit points by the shard's damage is destroyed, reduced to a pile of fine gray dust.

Countermeasures
✦ Destroying or disenchanting the mosaic is the only way to destroy the shard. Any square will suffice; they're all AC 38, other defenses 35, hp 200; resist 15 all.

G2: Red Brood-Mother's Lair

Encounter Level 30 (110,000 XP)

Setup

1 red brood mother (R)
Magma geyser trap (M)

This chamber, one of five like it, is where the red brood mother keeps her lair, laying eggs for Tiamat as fast as she can.

When the heroes reach the entrance to the chamber, read:

The entire chamber glows with a crimson light, and the reason is obvious: the floor of the chamber is a roiling sea of magma. Three islands rise from the magma, and on the furthest isle is a gargantuan red dragon.

It's hard to tell at first because of the waves of heat distorting your vision, but when the dragon shifts, you see its massive, distended belly, made lumpy with ovoid shapes underneath the skin. Other parts of the body are as sleek as any dragon, but the belly makes this dragon look massively obese—or pregnant.

Perception Check
DC 33: *The magma is bubbling near the edges.*
Dungeoneering Check
DC 28: *The bubbles in the magma could be a geyser of magma that will erupt after the slightest vibration nearby.*

The magma geyser should be something of a surprise, but the players already know that magma is dangerous and they may be warded against fire damage in any case. Of the brood mothers, the red one is the most dangerous. Next to Tiamat herself, this is the toughest dragon fight in the whole adventure.

Tactics

As with all brood mothers, emphasize the dragon's massive belly and use the *underbelly crush* whenever you can because it isolates a PC. Also, don't forget the dragon's fire aura, which deals a lot of automatic damage and will almost always give it concealment against ranged attacks.

Red Dragon: The standard dragon strategy (use *breath weapon* as often as you can, then move and melee to try to gather the characters together while *breath weapon* recharges) works well here. Use the *breath weapon* whenever you can, remembering that the secondary attack negates fire resistance for the rest of the encounter.

Frightful presence is most effective when it's used early—especially because stunned characters can't move away from the magma geysers. But wait a round or two if it looks like the heroes will move closer to the magma and closer to the dragon. Let them come to you, in other words.

Don't be afraid to leave a flank apparently unguarded or even to practically entice a rogue into moving into a flanking position. As soon as a PC takes the bait, use *tail strike* to push them into the magma for their temerity.

Red Brood Mother **Level 30 Solo Soldier**
Gargantuan natural magical beast (dragon) XP 95,000
Initiative +24 **Senses** Perception +26; darkvision
Inferno (Fire) aura 5; creatures that enter or start their turns in the aura take 20 fire damage. Creatures in the aura have concealment against ranged attacks.
HP 1,390; **Bloodied** 695
AC 48; **Fortitude** 48, **Reflex** 43, **Will** 42
Resist 40 fire
Saving Throws +5
Speed 12, fly 12 (hover)
Action Points 2

Bite (standard, at-will) ✦ **Fire**
Reach 4; +37 vs. AC; 2d12 + 12 damage, plus 6d6 fire damage.

Claw (standard, at-will)
Reach 4; +37 vs. AC; 2d12 + 12 damage.

Double Attack (standard, at-will)
The dragon makes two *claw* attacks.

M **Tail Strike** (immediate reaction, when an enemy moves to a position where it flanks the red dragon, at-will)
The dragon attacks the enemy with its tail: reach 4; +35 vs. Reflex; 4d10 + 12 damage, and the target is pushed 3 squares.

Underbelly Crush (standard, at-will)
Targets an adjacent creature; +30 vs. Reflex; 1d12 +10 damage, and a Large or smaller target is grabbed, pulled 1 square into the dragon's space, and restrained. A creature trapped underneath the brood mother's bulk has line of sight and line of effect only to the brood mother, and no creatures have line of sight or line of effect to it. A creature that escapes the grab is no longer underneath the brood mother and no longer restrained; the character shifts to the nearest square that is not part of the brood mother's space. If the brood mother moves so that it no longer occupies the grabbed character's space, then the character is no longer grabbed or restrained. *Sustain Minor:* The brood mother sustains the grab, and the target takes 20 damage plus 10 fire damage.

Breath Weapon (standard, recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Fire**
Close blast 5; +35 vs. Reflex; 4d12 + 10 fire damage, and the red dragon makes a secondary attack against the same target.
Secondary Attack
+33 vs. Fortitude; the target's fire resistance is negated until the end of the encounter.
Miss: Half damage, and no secondary attack.

Bloodied Breath (free, when first bloodied, encounter) ✦ **Fire**
The dragon's *breath weapon* recharges, and the dragon uses it immediately.

Frightful Presence (standard, encounter) ✦ **Fear**
Close burst 10; targets enemies; +35 vs. Will; the target is stunned until the end of the dragon's next turn. *Aftereffect:* The target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends).

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Draconic
Skills Bluff +24, Insight +26, Intimidate +29
Str 34 (+27) **Dex** 25 (+22) **Wis** 22 (+21)
Con 30 (+25) **Int** 18 (+19) **Cha** 19 (+19)

Magma Geyser	**Level 29 Blaster**
Hazard	XP 15.000

A geyser of super-heated, acidic liquid explodes from the ground.

Hazard: The geyser becomes active when triggered. Thereafter, it attacks every round on its initiative.

Perception

✦ DC 33: The character notices the bubbling before moving within 6 squares of it.

Dungeoneering

✦ DC 28: The character recognizes the danger of magma geysers before moving within 6 squares of it.

Initiative +3

Trigger

The geyser rolls initiative when one or more characters move within 4 squares of any magma space in the room. Each round on its initiative, it attacks. A particular geyser goes dormant if it misses everyone or if there's no one in the burst to hit. It's possible for characters to trigger multiple geysers. They all act on the same initiative, but they might go dormant at different times. If all go dormant, roll a new initiative if another is activated.

Attack

Standard Action **Close** burst 3

Targets Creatures in burst

Attack: +32 vs. Reflex

Hit: 2d8 + 10 fire damage and followup.

Followup: +32 vs. Fortitude

Hit: Ongoing 15 fire damage and blinded (save ends).

Miss: Half damage.

Countermeasures

✦ Acrobatics DC 28: A character in the burst can minimize the damage of the geyser with a successful check made as an immediate interrupt before the geyser's attack. With a successful check, the character takes half damage if the geyser hits and no damage if it misses.

Talking to the Brood Mother

As she fights, the brood mother is willing to talk, especially to taunt and scold the characters. Early in the battle, she'll say, "You cannot dare to oppose me—me, who carries the Dragon Queen's heirs!" This may be the characters' first hint about Tiamat's breeding plan. The brood mother has no particular interest in keeping her role secret—in fact she's proud to serve as a surrogate mother for Tiamat. If the heroes question whether the plan is working—because it isn't—the brood mother will fly into a rage and thereafter only roar at the PCs, not converse with them.

Features of the Area

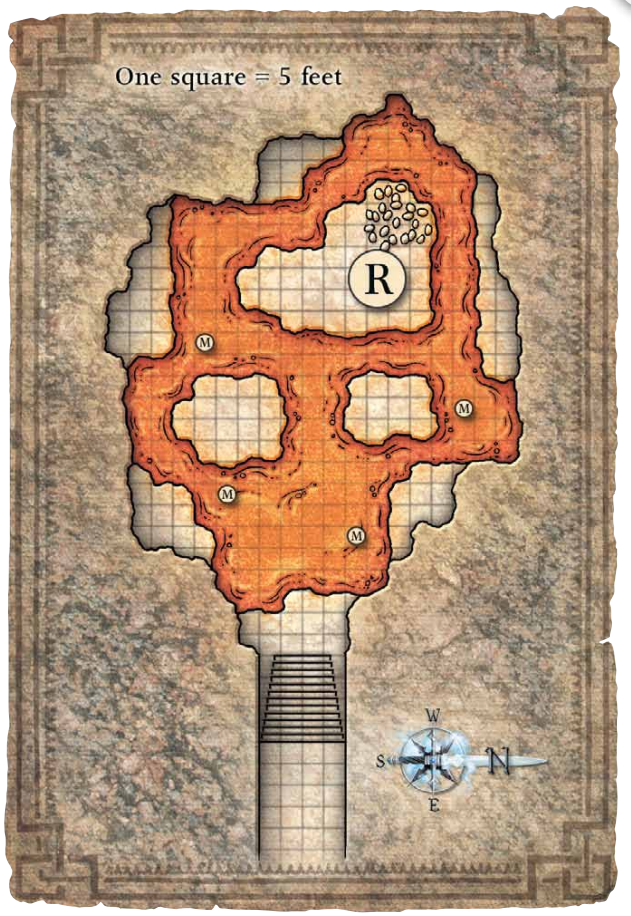
Illumination: The magma lights the room with an eerie red-orange glow.

Ceiling: The ceiling of the cavern is 30 feet high.

Eggs: There are 15 eggs here. About half are inert, but the other half will hatch red dragon wyrmlings in 1d6 months.

Treasure: Buried in a shallow trench near the eggs are 200 adamantine ingots worth 2,000 gp each and weighing 50 pounds each.

Magma: In addition to the geysers (described in the hazard box below), the magma itself can be lethal to characters who are immersed in it. Treat it like water (in that characters must swim their way out of it), but entering the magma or starting your turn in the magma deals 5d10 fire damage.



G3: Dragonborn Honor Guard

Encounter Level 30 (148,000 XP)

Setup

1 dragonborn annihilator (D)
3 champions of Tiamat, dragonguard dragon born champions (T)
Rising and falling block trap

Most of Tiamat's allies have deserted her, but a remnant of her dragonborn honor guard remains. They lie in wait in this chamber, ready to defend both the green brood mother and one of their ancestors—a dragonborn who clings to unlife as a vampire (found in encounter G4).

When the characters reach the entrance to the chamber, read:

This room's basalt walls have ornate runic carvings in several languages, each inlaid with a precious metal like gold, silver, or orium. Several languages are represented, and it's a mix of outdated wards against intrusion and imprecations against Bahamut and other enemies of the Dragon Queen.

But what immediately catches your attention is the floor. It's covered in silver and gold coins—deep enough that you need to dig your toe in to see the black marble underneath.

Perception Check
DC 28: Slight vibrations in the center walls (actually the blocks) suggest that they might be poised to move.
Arcana Check
DC 33: *The air is full of tremendous magical residue—kinetic energy of some sort.*

What makes this encounter sing is the interaction between monsters and the trap. Clever heroes will figure out the pattern of the moving stone blocks and can put it to work against the dragonborn. Naturally, the dragonborn will be trying to do the same thing to the characters.

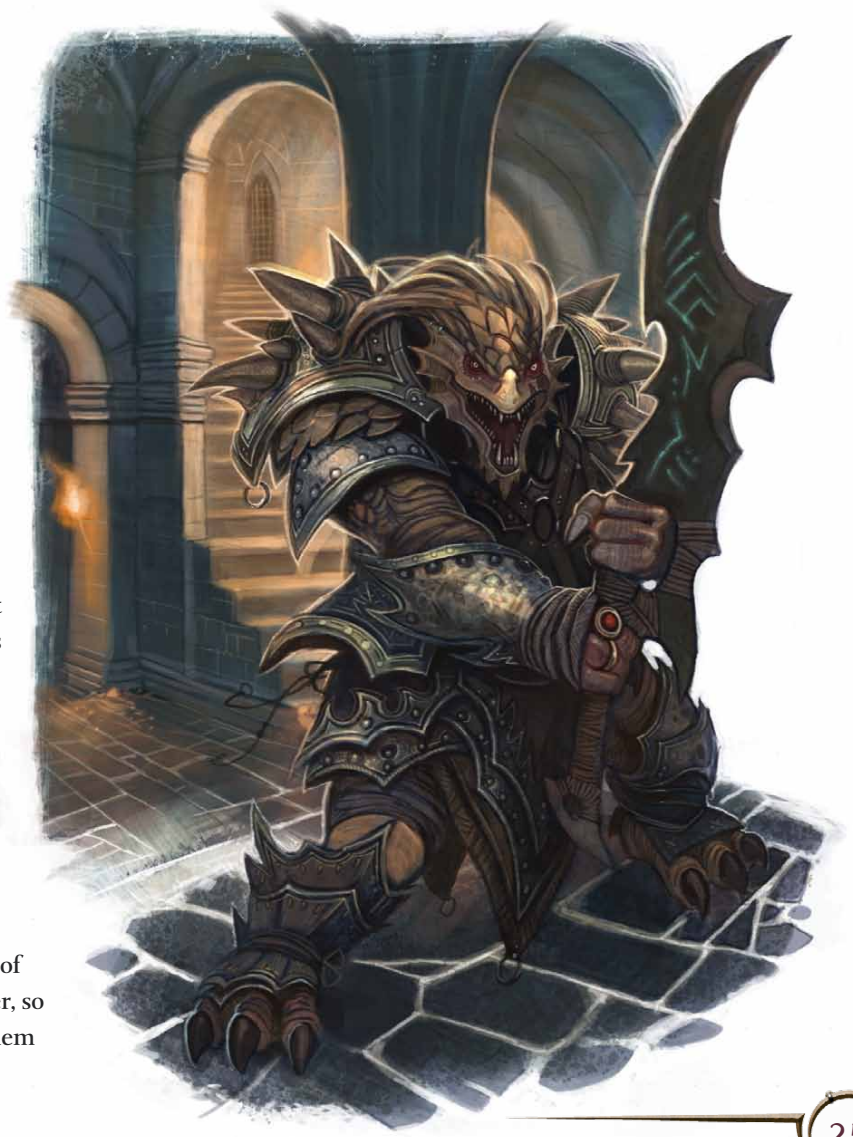
Tactics

The dragonborn annihilator is no pushover, but the real threat is the rising and falling blocks. The more that PCs and monsters alike interact with them, the more exciting the battle will be. Don't be shy about letting a champion of Tiamat get pulped by a block if that's what it takes to demonstrate the risk.

Dragonborn Annihilator: *Punishing strike* will kill characters in this room—and as soon as the first character gets pushed into the falling block area, all the players at your table will sit up and take notice. Both *punishing strike* and *sweeping assault* set up the annihilator and the champions for extra damage from *no remorse*.

You have powerful resistance from *chromatic boon*, but don't use it until you've taken a given damage type twice, because it's a choice you get to make only once.

Champion of Tiamat: It won't be apparent to the heroes right away, but the champions of Tiamat aren't much of a challenge. They are durable, however, so they'll stick around for a while. Use them to lure the PCs around and among the blocks. Don't forget the extra damage from *no remorse*—the characters can go prone from the champions' secondary attack, from the annihilator's *punishing strike* or *sweeping assault*, or because they made a saving throw to avoid being caught in the rising and falling blocks.



3 Champions of Tiamat, Dragonguard Dragonborn Champion **Level 26 Elite Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid, dragonborn XP 18,000 each

Initiative +20 **Senses** Perception +16
HP 470; **Bloodied** 235
AC 44; **Fortitude** 44, **Reflex** 42, **Will** 43
Resist 36 acid, 36 cold, 36 fire, 36 lightning, 36 poison
Saving Throws +2
Speed 5, fly 8 (clumsy)
Action Points 1

⊕ **Bastard Sword** (standard, at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+31 vs. AC (+32 while bloodied); 2d10 + 9 damage, and the dragonborn champion makes a secondary attack against the same target.
Secondary Attack
+29 vs. Fortitude (+30 while bloodied); the target is stunned until the end of the dragonborn champion's next turn and knocked prone.

Dragonguard's Protection (immediate interrupt, when an enemy adjacent to the dragonguard attacks its dragon patron, at-will)
The dragonguard makes a basic attack against the attacker.

Furious Blade (free, when first bloodied, encounter) ✦ **Weapon**
Requires bastard sword; close burst 1; targets enemies; +32 vs. AC (includes the bonus for *dragonborn fury*); 2d10 + 9 damage.

Dragonborn Fury (only while bloodied)
A dragonborn gains a +1 racial bonus to attack rolls while bloodied.

No Remorse
The dragonborn champion deals an extra 2d10 damage on melee attacks against a prone target.

Shake It Off (free; recharge ⚀ ⚁ ⚂ ⚃ ⚄)
The dragonborn champion automatically succeeds on a saving throw against one effect of its choice.

Alignment Any **Languages** Common, Draconic
Skills Athletics +23, History +22, Intimidate +26
Str 29 (+22) **Dex** 20 (+18) **Wis** 17 (+16)
Con 23 (+19) **Int** 15 (+15) **Cha** 22 (+19)
Equipment: bastard sword, heavy shield, plate armor

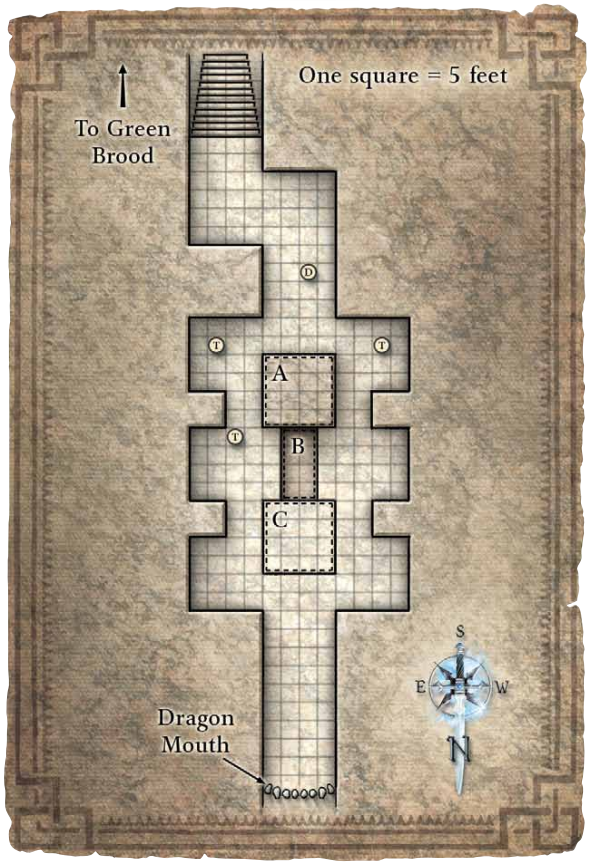
Features of the Area

Illumination: This cavern has only the illumination the characters bring with them.

Ceiling: The ceiling of the cavern is 30 feet high. Remember that there are 30-foot high alcoves above each block section where the blocks fit in the "up" position.

Rising and Falling Blocks: Described in the trap section below.

Coins on Floor: Each square has 2,000 gp (in an equal mix of gold and silver) in it, and it takes someone 5 minutes to pick them all up. To save you from counting, there are 136 squares with coins on them.



Rising and Falling Blocks **Level 11 Elite Blaster**
Trap XP 1,200

Massive stone blocks rise and fall in shafts near the center of the room.

Trap: Depending on its position, each area can be a barrier or a pit, and creatures can also be squashed under several tons of stone.

Perception

✦ DC 28: Slight vibrations in the walls (actually the blocks) suggest that they might be poised to move.

Arcana

✦ DC 33: The air is full of tremendous magical residue—kinetic energy of some sort.

Initiative +4 (roll A, B, and C separately)

Trigger

The trap is triggered by any movement into the room.

Attack

Standard Action **Area** All creatures within area A, B, or C (resolved separately)

Target: Each creature in the area

Effect: On the trap's initiative count, blocks A and C move in the following pattern:

1. up into the ceiling (bottom of the block flush with the ceiling, top flat against the roof of the opening);
2. down to form walls (bottom and top flush with the floor and ceiling);
3. down into the floor (top flush with the floor);
4. down to the bottom of the 90-foot pit (top 60 feet below the floor);
5. up to floor level (top flush with the floor);
6. and so on in an endless cycle.

Block B moves in the same pattern, but it begins with step 3.

Creatures on the edge of a block can make a saving throw when the block moves. If they succeed, they can slide to any unoccupied square beyond the block area and fall prone there. Creatures not on the periphery and creatures who fail their saving throws are at the mercy of the blocks.

Fall into a pit when the block is up: 9d10 falling damage

Fall into a pit when the block is all the way down: 6d10 falling damage

Crushed against ceiling: 2d10 + 40 damage.

Crushed against floor: 3d10 + 50 damage.

Countermeasures

✦ Thievery DC 28: A character in one of the block areas or adjacent to it when the block is fully in the chamber (at step 2) can jam it, thereby preventing further movement.

✦ Arcana DC 33: Certain carved runes on the blocks can be defaced, which will send the blocks hurtling into the pits one last time.

Dragonborn Annihilator **Level 29 Solo Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid, dragonborn XP 75,000

Initiative +26 **Senses** Perception +23; darkvision

Tiamat's Favor (Acid, Cold, Fire, Lightning, or Poison) aura 5; any enemy that starts its turn within the aura takes 20 damage of one of the following types: acid, cold, fire, lightning, or poison. The annihilator chooses which type at the start of its turn.

HP 1,340; **Bloodied** 670

AC 49; **Fortitude** 44, **Reflex** 44, **Will** 45

Saving Throws +5

Speed 7, fly 10 (hover)

Action Points 2

⊕ **Greatsword** (standard, at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+36 vs. AC; (+37 while bloodied); 3d10 + 10 damage.

Dragonborn Wrath (standard, at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Requires greatsword; the annihilator makes two *greatsword* attacks, each against a different target; +34 vs. AC; 3d8 + 10 damage.

Punishing Strike (immediate reaction, when an enemy attacks the annihilator with a melee attack, at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Requires greatsword; the annihilator attacks the triggering enemy; +36 vs. AC (+37 while bloodied); 3d10 + 10 damage, and the target is pushed 5 squares and knocked prone.

Conflagration Breath (standard; sustain minor, encounter) ✦ **Fire, Zone**
Close blast 5; +32 vs. Reflex (+33 while bloodied); 4d10 + 9 fire damage, and the target takes ongoing 10 fire damage (save ends). The blast creates a zone that lasts until the end of the annihilator's next turn (sustain minor). Any creature that enters or starts its turn in the zone takes 10 fire damage.

Fury of the Dragon (free, when first bloodied, encounter) ✦ **Acid, Cold, Fire, Lightning, or Poison**
Close burst 6; targets enemies; +34 vs. Reflex (+35 while bloodied); 4d10 + 6 damage of one of the following types: acid, cold, fire, lightning, or poison.

Sweeping Assault (standard, recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃) ✦ **Weapon**
Requires greatsword; close burst 1; +34 vs. Reflex (+35 while bloodied); 2d10 + 10 damage, and the target is knocked prone.

Chromatic Boon (immediate interrupt, when an enemy attacks the annihilator; encounter)
The annihilator gains resist 30 to one of the following damage types until the end of the encounter: acid, cold, fire, lightning, or poison.

Dragonborn Fury (only while bloodied)
A dragonborn gains a +1 racial bonus to attack rolls while bloodied.

No Remorse
The annihilator deals 2d10 extra damage with melee attacks against a prone target.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Draconic, Supernal

Skills History +24, Insight +28, Intimidate +32, Religion +27

Str 31 (+24) **Dex** 30 (+24) **Wis** 29 (+23)
Con 28 (+23) **Int** 26 (+22) **Cha** 32 (+25)

Equipment: greatsword, plate armor

G4: Green Brood-Mother's Lair

Encounter Level 30 (109,000 XP)

Setup

1 green brood mother (G)
2 dragonborn vampire lords (V)

Centuries ago (before she became part of Tiamat's breeding scheme), the green brood mother dallied with two dragonborn champions of Tiamat. She couldn't bear to lose them to old age, so she arranged to have them turned into vampires. They wait upon her to this day, both loyal to her and repulsed because she cursed them so.

When the heroes reach the entrance to the chamber, read:

This room is full of fetid, foul-smelling water upon which float hundreds of pine tree trunks. At the center of that floating mass is a green dragon. While it's gargantuan, its swollen belly is grotesquely immense, and as you look, you discern curved lumps beneath its belly-scales. Its wings are spread wide, and on each sits a dragonborn. They seem to be conversing.

Perception Check
DC 23: *The water doesn't look deep—just enough to float the logs.*

Talking to the Brood Mother

As this battle plays out, both the brood mother and the vampires talk—both with the intruders and with each other. What they say (and what the characters say in return) doesn't change the tenor of the battle, but it's an opportunity for the players to learn more about Tiamat's breeding scheme and the nature of the five dragon caves. The brood mother might order the vampires to "guard the Dragon Queen's eggs at all costs!" for example.

Tactics

The trick in this battle is to play up the log-balancing, which should be easy for some PCs but more difficult for others. It will be tempting for characters to stay put rather than move, but the brood mother can punish that tactic with her *tail sweep*.

Brood Mother: You want to force movement on the characters and deny them the ability to move for themselves—an "I must move, yet I can't move" situation. *Luring glare* leads nicely to *underbelly crush*, of course. Beyond that, though, you have an aura that imposes difficult terrain, challenging terrain (the logs) that affects the heroes but not the monsters, and a *breath weapon* that slows its targets. And don't forget the dragon's aura, which has the side effect of making it impossible for most PCs to shift while near her.

The other key advantage you have is ongoing damage from both your *breath weapon* and your *bite*. The longer the battle rages, the more automatic damage you'll deal that way.

Unlike most dragons, in this case you'll want to save the *frightful presence* attack until midway through the fight. When you use it, have the vampires *blood drain* stunned characters to weaken them and regain vampire hit points.

Vampire Lords: If possible, have the vampires keep their distance from the brood mother—they're affected by the *lashing tail* aura, too. They likewise should avoid the brood mother's *breath weapon*. They're immune to the poison, but they'll still be slowed. Beyond that, use *dominating gaze* whenever it's available and don't be shy about healing—using second wind, *blood drain*, or preferably both.

2 Vampire Lords (Dragonborn)	**Level 28 Elite Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid (undead)	XP 26,000 each
Initiative +25	**Senses** Perception +19; darkvision
HP 408; **Bloodied** 204	
Regeneration 15 (regeneration does not function while the vampire lord is exposed to direct sunlight)	
AC 44; **Fortitude** 42, **Reflex** 41, **Will** 40	
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 20 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 20 radiant	
Saving Throws +2	
Speed 8, climb 4 (spider climb)	
Action Points 1	
Broadsword (standard, at-will) ✦ **Weapon** +35 vs. AC; 3d10 + 5 damage.	
Double Strike (standard, at-will) ✦ **Weapon** The vampire lord makes two *broadsword* attacks.	
Blood Drain (standard; requires combat advantage against the target, recharges when an adjacent creature becomes bloodied) ✦ **Healing** +33 vs. Fortitude; 4d12 + 8 damage, the target is weakened (save ends), and the vampire lord regains 102 hit points.	
Dominating Gaze (minor, recharge ⚅) ✦ **Charm** Ranged 5; +33 vs. Will; the target is dominated (save ends, with a -2 penalty to the saving throw). *Aftereffect:* The target is dazed (save ends). The vampire lord can dominate only one creature at a time.	
Breath Weapon (minor, encounter) ✦ **Poison** Close blast 3; +29 vs. Fortitude; 2d10 + 5 poison damage.	
Mist Form (standard; encounter) ✦ **Polymorph** The vampire lord becomes insubstantial and gains a fly speed of 12, but cannot make attacks. The vampire lord can remain in *mist form* for up to 1 hour or end the effect as a minor action.	
Second Wind (standard; encounter) ✦ **Healing** The vampire lord spends a healing surge and regains 102 hit points. The vampire lord gains a +2 bonus to all defenses until the start of its next turn.	
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Abyssal, Common
Skills Acrobatics +28, Athletics +29, Intimidate +27	
Str 30 (+24)	**Dex** 28 (+23) **Wis** 20 (+19)
Con 22 (+20)	**Int** 18 (+18) **Cha** 26 (+22)
Equipment: chain armor, broadsword	

Features of the Area

Illumination: This cavern has only the illumination the heroes bring with them.

Ceiling: The ceiling of the cavern is 30 feet high.

Logs: The logs in this room are floating in water two to three feet deep. Accordingly, the squares with logs in them are challenging terrain, requiring a DC 28 Acrobatics check when the character tries to enter the first log square each turn. Characters who fail the Acrobatics check fall prone and end their move action in that first log square. The brood mother is big enough to ignore the logs, and the vampires have Acrobatics +28, making a check unnecessary.

Water: The water is strongly poisonous; a creature that drinks the water takes 4d10 + 10 poison damage and ongoing 10 poison damage (save ends, probably when the incautious PC retches the water back up). A character who is knocked prone in a water square may swallow some inadvertently; avoiding this requires a DC 24 Endurance check. Water squares are difficult terrain.

Eggs: There are 15 eggs here. About half are inert, but the other half will hatch green dragon wyrmlings in 1d6 months.

Treasure: Scattered among the eggs are 200 jade figurines representing dragonborn soldiers, each worth 3,000 gp. Also present is treasure parcel G.

Green Brood Mother **Level 27 Solo Controller**
Gargantuan natural magical beast (dragon) XP 55,000
Initiative +23 **Senses** Perception +22; darkvision
Lashing Tail aura 2; all creatures other than the dragon treat the area within the aura as difficult terrain. The dragon loses this aura while airborne.
HP 1,250; **Bloodied** 625
AC 43; **Fortitude** 39, **Reflex** 41, **Will** 39
Resist 30 poison
Saving Throws +5
Speed 10, fly 14 (hover)
Action Points 2

Bite (standard, at-will) ✦ **Poison**
Reach 4; +32 vs. AC; 1d12 + 10 damage, plus ongoing 25 poison damage (save ends).

Claw (standard, at-will)
Reach 4; +32 vs. AC; 1d10 + 10 damage.

Double Attack (standard, at-will)
The dragon makes two *claw* attacks.

Flyby Attack (standard, recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞)
The dragon flies up to 14 squares and makes a *bite* attack at any point during the move without provoking an opportunity attack from the target.

Tail Sweep (immediate reaction, if an adjacent enemy does not move on its turn, at-will)
+32 vs. Reflex; 2d12 + 10 damage, and the target is knocked prone.

Luring Glare (minor 1/round, at-will) ✦ **Charm, Gaze**
Range 10; +30 vs. Will; the target slides 4 squares.

Underbelly Crush (standard, at-will)
Targets an adjacent creature; +30 vs. Reflex; 1d12 +10 damage, and a Large or smaller target is grabbed, pulled 1 square into the dragon's space, and restrained. A creature trapped underneath the brood mother's bulk has line of sight and line of effect only to the brood mother, and no creatures have line of sight or line of effect to it. A creature that escapes the grab is no longer underneath the brood mother and no longer restrained; the character shifts to the nearest square that is not part of the brood mother's space. If the brood mother moves so that it no longer occupies the grabbed character's space, then the character is no longer grabbed or restrained. *Sustain Minor:* The brood mother sustains the grab, and the target takes 20 damage plus 10 poison damage.

Breath Weapon (standard, recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞) ✦ **Poison**
Close blast 5; +30 vs. Fortitude; 3d10 + 8 poison damage, and the target takes ongoing 15 poison damage and is slowed (save ends both). *Aftereffect:* The target is slowed (save ends).

Bloodied Breath (free, when first bloodied, encounter) ✦ **Poison**
The dragon's *breath weapon* recharges, and the dragon uses it immediately.

Frightful Presence (standard, at-will) ✦ **Fear**
Close burst 10; targets enemies; +30 vs. Will; the target is stunned until the end of the dragon's next turn. *Aftereffect:* The target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends).

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Draconic
Skills Bluff +31, Diplomacy +26, Insight +27, Intimidate +26
Str 24 (+20) **Dex** 30 (+23) **Wis** 18 (+17)
Con 26 (+21) **Int** 18 (+17) **Cha** 26 (+21)

G5: Hall of Vanquished Champions

Encounter Level 30 (114,000 XP)

Setup

1 deathshrieker (D)
1 terrifying iron golem (G)
1 lich castellan wizard (L)

This room, rarely visited even before Tiamat's defeat, was intended to honor those who'd given their lives in the Dragon Queen's service. Tiamat isn't known for her sense of nostalgia, so the hall is small. One of Tiamat's last loyal advisors remains here, contemplating past victories and more prosperous days while awaiting Tiamat's inevitable resurgence or demise.

When the characters reach the entrance to the chamber, read:

This grand chamber features statues of dragons everywhere, including rampant-pose dragons around the room's edges and three dragons depicted in soaring poses attached to the ceiling with chains.

At the far end of the room is a skeletal figure in robes, flanked by a shadowy undead on one side and an immense iron statue on the other.

Perception Check
DC 28: *The room smells strongly of chlorine.*
History Check
DC 23: *You recognize several of the dragons as terrors from bygone ages, notorious for their rapacity and cruelty.*

The heroes get to tangle with three very different foes: a spell-slinging lich, a golem that acts as a defender, and a deathshrieker that's mobile even as it reduces the PCs' ability to maneuver. This battle should feel as if the monsters are employing character-style tactics against the heroes.

Tactics

This battle is a triangulation challenge for you as the DM; try to keep the iron golem engaged with the characters, the deathshrieker darting in and out of harm's way, and the wizard causing trouble from the periphery

Lich Castellan: Ideally, the lich stays away from the fight and launches a *shadow storm* at the heroes every round, but inevitably the PCs will engage the lich in melee. When that happens, the lich responds with *gaze of command*. If the gaze doesn't work or isn't available, then it uses *lich's disdain*, and if that somehow fails, it resorts to *death touch*. Near the midpoint of the battle, when combat has settled into a pattern, the lich will use a *lightning storm*, which thereafter becomes the best place to teleport someone to with *lich's disdain*. The lich will place the *lightning storm* without regard to the position of the golem or the deathshrieker. It didn't get to be a lich by worrying over friendly fire incidents.

It's easy to forget two small but important aspects of the lich: its regeneration 15 at the beginning of each turn and the free close blast 3 attack it can make when it hits with lightning damage. Keep those in mind.

Terrifying Iron Golem: Running the iron golem is simple: Mark as many characters as you can with *cleave*, then be alert for opportunities to trigger *dazing fist*. Don't forget that the golem gains a poison aura once it's bloodied, and both the deathshrieker and the lich are immune to poison.

Deathshrieker: The deathshrieker has an aura that slows characters automatically. With fly 8, it should be able to run rings around the slowed heroes. This is also a great way to pin characters in the golem's noxious fumes. Set yourself up for *screams of the damned* as often as possible, but neither the golem nor the lich are immune to it, so keep them out of the burst.

Deathshrieker	**Level 30 Elite Skirmisher**
Medium shadow humanoid (undead)	XP 38,000
Initiative +28	**Senses** Perception +23; darkvision
Despair (Psychic) aura 5; an enemy that starts its turn in the aura takes 10 psychic damage and is slowed.	
HP 386; **Bloodied** 193	
AC 42; **Fortitude** 42, **Reflex** 44, **Will** 42	
Immune disease, fear, poison; **Resist** 30 necrotic, insubstantial; **Vulnerable** 15 radiant	
Saving Throws +2	
Speed fly 8 (hover)	
Action Points 1	
Slam (standard, at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**	
+35 vs. AC; 2d8 + 10 necrotic damage.	
Scream of Doom (standard, at-will) ✦ **Psychic**	
Ranged 20; +33 vs. Will; 3d8 + 10 psychic damage.	
Death Rattle (when the deathshrieker is reduced to 0 hp) ✦ **Necrotic**	
Close burst 10; +33 vs. Fortitude; 5d12 + 10 necrotic damage, and the target is weakened (save ends).	
Screams of the Damned (standard, recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Psychic**	
Close burst 10; +33 vs. Fortitude; 5d12 + 10 psychic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).	
Alignment Chaotic evil	**Languages** Common
Skills Stealth +31	
Str 26 (+23)	**Dex** 32 (+26)	**Wis** 16 (+18)
Con 28 (+24)	**Int** 10 (+15)	**Cha** 27 (+23)

Terrifying Iron Golem **Level 30 Elite Soldier**
Large natural animate (construct) XP 38,000

Initiative +21 **Senses** Perception +16; darkvision
Noxious Fumes (Poison) aura 2; while the iron golem is bloodied, each creature that enters the aura or starts its turn there takes 10 poison damage.
HP 552; **Bloodied** 276
AC 46; **Fortitude** 46, **Reflex** 40, **Will** 38
Immune disease, poison, sleep
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6 (cannot shift)
Action Points 1

Iron Blade (standard, at-will)
Reach 2; +37 vs. AC; 3d10 + 7 damage, and the target is marked (save ends).

Cleave (standard, at-will)
The iron golem makes two *iron blade* attacks, each against a different target.

Dazing Fist (immediate interrupt, when a creature marked by the iron golem and within its reach moves or shifts, at-will)
Reach 2; targets the triggering creature; +35 vs. Fortitude; the target is dazed (save ends).

Breath Weapon (standard, recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞) ✦ **Poison**
Close blast 3; +35 vs. Fortitude; 4d8 + 9 poison damage, and ongoing 10 poison damage (save ends).

Toxic Death (when first bloodied and again when the iron golem drops to 0 hit points) ✦ **Poison**
Close burst 3; +35 vs. Fortitude; 4d8 + 6 poison damage, and ongoing 15 poison damage (save ends).

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** -
Str 30 (+25) **Dex** 17 (+18) **Wis** 13 (+16)
Con 28 (+24) **Int** 3 (+11) **Cha** 3 (+11)
Equipment: longsword

Lich Castellan Wizard **Level 30 Elite Controller**
Medium natural humanoid, human (undead) XP 38,000

Initiative +21 **Senses** Perception +27; darkvision
HP 556; **Bloodied** 278; see also *indestructible*, *second wind*
Regeneration 15 (if the lich takes radiant damage, regeneration doesn't function on its next turn)
AC 44; **Fortitude** 42, **Reflex** 43, **Will** 41; see also *second wind*
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 15 necrotic
Saving Throws +2
Speed 8
Action Points 1

Death Touch (standard, at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
+34 vs. Reflex; 3d8 + 10 necrotic damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).

Lightning Bolt (standard, at-will) ✦ **Lightning**
Ranged 20; +34 vs. Reflex; 3d8 + 10 lightning damage, and the target slides 3 squares and is dazed (save ends).

Orb of Shadow (standard, at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
Ranged 20; +34 vs. Fortitude; 3d10 + 6 necrotic damage, and the target slides 3 squares and is blinded (save ends).

Shadow Storm (standard, at-will) ✦ **Lightning, Necrotic**
The lich makes *lightning bolt* and *orb of shadow* attacks against two different targets.

Gaze of Command (minor, recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞) ✦ **Gaze, Psychic**
Ranged 5; +34 vs. Will; 5d10 + 9 psychic damage and the target is dominated (save ends).

Lich's Disdain (minor, at-will) ✦ **Psychic, Teleportation**
Ranged 5; +34 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 10 psychic damage, and the target is teleported 20 feet above any unoccupied space within 20 squares. A creature that falls takes 2d10 damage.

Lightning Storm (standard; sustain minor, recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞) ✦ **Lightning, Necrotic, Zone**
Area burst 2 within 20; +32 vs. Fortitude; 3d8 + 10 lightning and necrotic damage. The burst creates a zone that lasts until the end of the lich's next turn. The zone is considered difficult terrain. Any creature that starts its turn within the zone takes 20 lightning and necrotic damage. The lich can sustain or dismiss the zone as a minor action.

Indestructible
When the lich is reduced to 0 hit points, its body and possessions crumble into dust but the lich is not destroyed. It reappears (along with its possessions) in 1d10 days within 1 square of its phylactery unless the phylactery is also found and destroyed. (The lich's phylactery is hidden in a secret temple in Everlost.)

Second Wind (standard; encounter) ✦ **Healing**
The lich spends a healing surge and regains 139 hit points. The lich gains a +2 bonus to all defenses until the start of its next turn.

Staff of Storms (free; encounter)
After making an attack that deals lightning damage, the lich deals 3d8 + 10 lightning and thunder damage to every creature in a close blast 3.

Alignment Chaotic Evil **Languages** Abyssal, Common, Draconic, Infernal
Skills Arcana +31, History +31, Insight +29
Str 21 (+20) **Dex** 22 (+21) **Wis** 25 (+22)
Con 30 (+25) **Int** 33 (+26) **Cha** 28 (+24)
Equipment: staff of storms

Features of the Area

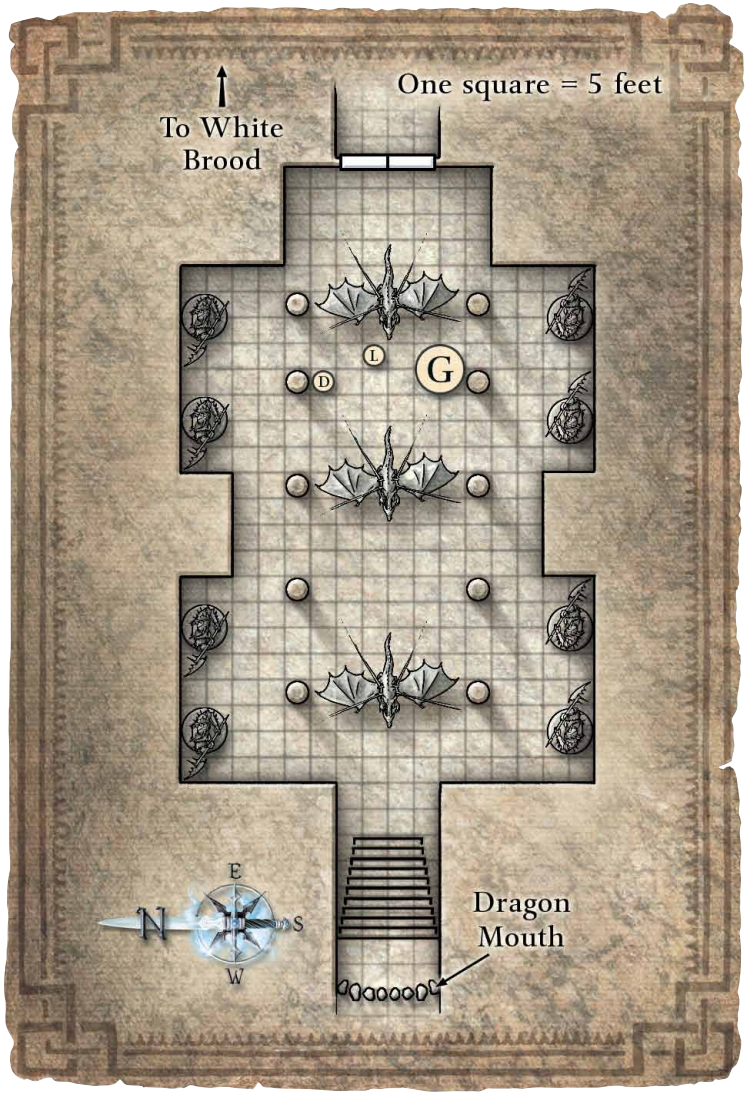
Illumination: This cavern has only the illumination the PCs bring with them.

Ceiling: The ceiling of the cavern is 40 feet high.

Columns: They're solid ivory, inlaid with gold, and they're blocking terrain.

Statues: Each statue is encrusted with 10,000 gp in gems that take 30 minutes to pry off each statue. Placed at the base of the statues are treasure parcels C and D.

Suspended Statues: The chains holding up the statues have 25 hp and defenses of 25. If the chains are destroyed, the statue falls to the ground, dealing 5d10 + 50 damage to any creature underneath it and turning all those squares into difficult terrain.



G6: White Brood-Mother's Lair

Encounter Level 30 (120,000 XP)

Setup

1 white brood mother (W)
3 dread bonespitters (D)
Thin ice hazard

Many of the white brood mother's eggs aren't hatching. Tiamat has suffused the brood mother's chamber with necrotic energy, hoping to create half-alive, half-undead hatchlings. The white brood mother weeps piteously over her inert eggs but flies into a rage when anyone threatens them.

When the characters reach the entrance to the chamber, read:

A pool of frigid water sits in front of you. Beyond is a ramp of ice that leads up to a plateau upon which squats an immensely obese white dragon, its corpulent belly full of eggs—each as big as a human.

Nature Check
DC 26: *Some of the ice on the lower part of the ramp is dangerously thin.*
Religion Check
DC 33: *The very air seems suffused with necrotic energy.*

The thin ice trap is a "gotcha" moment, pure and simple. The real surprise happens during the second or third round, when the deathspitters rise from the tainted water and give the characters something more to worry about.

Tactics

Let your sense of drama and timing determine when to reveal the presence of the deathspitters. Ideally, you'll wait until the heroes think they know what the encounter is all about, then have the undead dragons rise from beneath the water's surface. If the PCs have reached the ramp, all the better.

Brood Mother: The brood mother's aura is quite effective, inhibiting movement and prohibiting most shifting nearby and gives her concealment against ranged attacks. Because they probably can't shift, melee combatants will move to gain advantageous combat positions. Because the brood mother does extra damage with opportunity attacks, it may be worthwhile to lure the characters into making such moves—by leaving good flanking squares available, for example.

The brood mother's *breath weapon* is potent both because of the damage it does and because it weakens those characters it hits. If possible, save *frightful presence* for just before the brood mother is about to be bloodied. This requires both timing and luck, but *breath weapon* followed by *frightful presence* followed by *bloodied breath* (triggered by the few heroes that weren't stunned) can be a devastating string of attacks against the PCs.

Ancient White Dragon **Level 28 Solo Brute**
Gargantuan natural magical beast (dragon) XP 30,250
Initiative +15 **Senses** Perception +21; darkvision
Aura of Winter (Cold) aura 5; a creature that enters or begins its turn in the aura takes 30 cold damage. The ground is treated as difficult terrain, and creatures flying in the aura (other than the dragon) move at half speed. Creatures in the aura have concealment against ranged attacks.
HP 1,185; **Bloodied** 592
AC 42; **Fortitude** 47, **Reflex** 41, **Will** 42
Resist 30 cold
Saving Throws +5
Speed 9 (ice walk), fly 9 (hover)
Action Points 2
⊕ **Bite** (standard, at-will) ✦ **Cold**
Reach 4; +33 vs. AC; 2d12 + 9 damage, plus 3d12 cold damage (plus an extra 3d12 cold damage on a successful opportunity attack).
⊕ **Claw** (standard, at-will)
Reach 4; +33 vs. AC; 2d12 + 9 damage.
⸸ **Dragon's Fury** (standard, at-will)
The dragon makes two *claw* attacks. If the dragon hits a single target with both *claws*, it makes a *bite* attack against the same target.
⸸ **Underbelly Crush** (standard, at-will)
Targets an adjacent creature; +30 vs. Reflex; 1d12 +10 damage, and a Large or smaller target is grabbed, pulled 1 square into the dragon's space, and restrained. A creature trapped underneath the brood mother's bulk has line of sight and line of effect only to the brood mother, and no creatures have line of sight or line of effect to it. A creature that escapes the grab is no longer underneath the brood mother and no longer restrained; the character shifts to the nearest square that is not part of the brood mother's space. If the brood mother moves so that it no longer occupies the grabbed character's space, then the character is no longer grabbed or restrained. *Sustain Minor:* The brood mother sustains the grab, and the target takes 20 damage plus 10 cold damage.
Breath Weapon (standard, recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Cold**
Close blast 5; +31 vs. Reflex; 8d6 + 11 cold damage, the target is slowed and weakened (save ends both), and the white dragon makes a secondary attack against the target. *Secondary Attack*
+31 vs. Fortitude; the target's cold resistance is negated until the end of the encounter.
Bloodied Breath (free, when first bloodied, encounter) ✦ **Cold**
The dragon's *breath weapon* recharges, and the dragon uses it immediately.
Frightful Presence (standard, encounter) ✦ **Fear**
Close burst 10; targets enemies; +31 vs. Will; the target is stunned until the end of the dragon's next turn. *Aftereffect:* The target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends).
Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Draconic
Skills Athletics +29
Str 25 (+19) **Dex** 17 (+15) **Wis** 18 (+16)
Con 29 (+21) **Int** 15 (+14) **Cha** 15 (+14)

Dread Bonespitters: These undead dragons ideally use *bone shard* and *bone storm* while flying around the periphery of the chamber, darting in to deliver *tail slaps* only when they have a chance of pushing a character into the water. The more immobilizing they can do, the better. The brood mother can more easily line up targets within the blast of her breath weapon if they're immobilized.

3 Dread Bonespitters (D)	Level 29 Artillery
Huge natural animate (dragon, undead)	XP 15,000 each
Initiative +26 **Senses** Perception +20; darkvision	
HP 210; **Bloodied** 105	
AC 43; **Fortitude** 42, **Reflex** 43, **Will** 39	
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 30 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 10 radiant	
Speed 10, fly 8	
⊕ **Tail Slap** (standard, at-will)	
Reach 3; +34 vs. AC; 2d12 + 10 damage, and the target is pushed 2 squares.	
✈ **Bone Shard** (standard, at-will)	
Ranged 20; +36 vs. AC; 4d10 + 10 damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).	
✧ **Bone Storm** (standard, recharge ⚅) ✦ **Teleportation**	
Close blast 10; +34 vs. AC; 4d10 + 10 damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends). The bonespitter can teleport to any square within the blast's area. *Miss:* Half damage, and the target is not immobilized.	
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –	
Str 28 (+23) **Dex** 34 (+26) **Wis** 22 (+20)	
Con 30 (+24) **Int** 3 (+10) **Cha** 15 (+16)	

Talking to the Brood Mother

The white brood mother isn't as enthusiastic a participant as the other four brood mothers. If her eggs are threatened, for example, she'll shriek, "Destroy them for all I care! I'm unworthy to carry those eggs! Everything here is taint and death and sorrow!" The characters can easily goad her into a hysterical rage. This doesn't have any direct effect on the combat, but it's a powerful roleplaying moment.

Thin Ice	Level 25 Obstacle
Hazard	XP 7,000
A slick sheet of ice isn't as strong as it looks.	
Hazard: The thin ice is difficult terrain (like the rest of the ice on the map), but it also collapses with more than a few pounds of weight on it.	
Nature	
✦ DC 26: The character identifies the squares of thin ice.	
Religion	
✦ DC 33: The character senses the presence of necrotic energy somewhere below the chamber.	
Trigger	
The ice attacks when a creature enters it.	
Attack	
Opportunity Action **Melee**	
Target: Creature on the ice	
Effect: The ice gives way. The creature that triggered the trap immediately attempts a saving throw. If it succeeds, that character is prone in any adjacent square not in the thin ice area. If the saving throw fails, the creature is dunked into tainted, necrotically-infused water below the ice, taking 20 poison damage and 20 necrotic damage. At the start of every turn in the water, the creature takes an additional 20 poison damage and 20 necrotic damage.	
Countermeasures	
✦ Fire damage: If thin ice squares are within the area of any fire attack, the ice collapses, even if there was no weight upon it.	

Features of the Area

Illumination: This cavern has only the illumination the heroes bring with them.

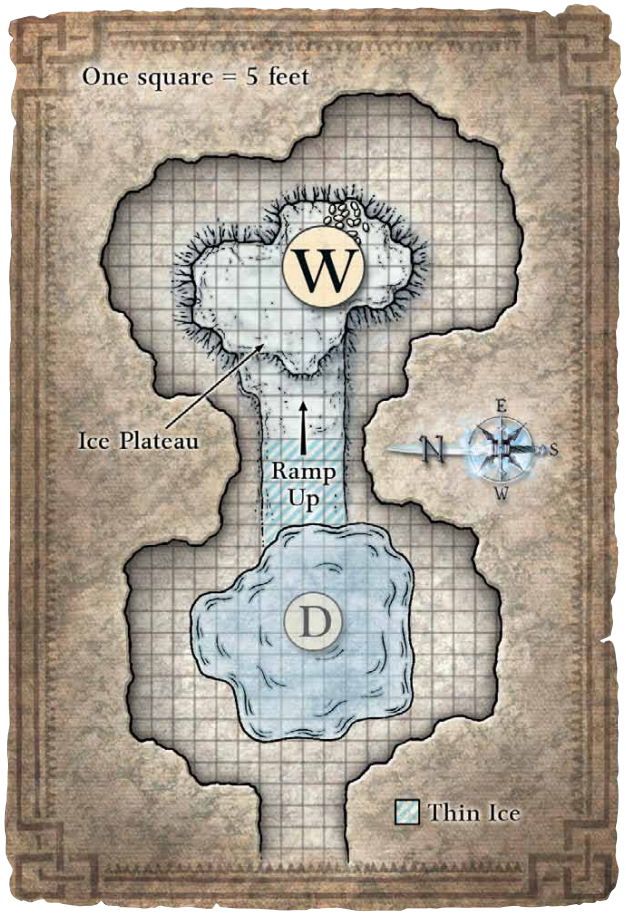
Ceiling: The ceiling of the cavern is 30 feet high and covered in icicles. They fall at the slightest provocation. Falling icicles don't cause any damage, but the players won't know that. Describe the smashing ice dramatically for as long as it keeps the players on edge.

Water: The water is cold (of course), but it's also tainted by both toxins and death-energy, so that it deals 20 necrotic and 20 poison damage to any creature that enters it or starts its turn in it. Creatures can swim in the water normally. It is 15 feet deep at its deepest.

Eggs: There are 15 eggs here. All have dead wyrmlings within them.

Ice Plateau: The squares atop the plateau aren't as slippery as the ramp, but they're still difficult terrain.

Ramp: The squares atop the ramp are challenging terrain, requiring a DC 28 Acrobatics check to negotiate. Characters who fail the Acrobatics check fall prone and end their move action one square downhill from the square where they slipped.



G7: Gate Chamber

Encounter Level 30 (93,000 XP)

Setup

1 runescribed dracolich consort of Tiamat (D)
Far Realm gate trap

This room contains several portals that the gatekeeper, a dracolich older than anyone here but Tiamat, controls to enable Tiamat's forces to come and go. Now no one wants to visit Tiamat (either from fear or because they believe her demise is imminent), so the gatekeeper finds itself with little business.

When the PCs reach the entrance to the chamber, read:

There's a blue-green swirl of energy in the middle of this chamber, and magic portals of glossy black slate around the periphery. Within the energy field is a skeletal dragon of immense size, its eyes glowing crimson with hate.

Perception Check
DC 26: *There's a flickering near two of the gates.* (Roll 1d8 twice and give the heroes advance warning of which two maddening gates open first.)
Arcana Check
DC 33: Runes around the portals indicate that each gate can be used in a variant of the Planar Portal ritual, and that a designated gatekeeper can turn them on and off at will.

Anticipating interlopers from Tiamat's rival evil gods, the dracolich has prepared an unpleasant surprise. The gates themselves are attuned to particularly frightening, maddening parts of the Far Realm—places horrifying even to behold from the safety of the gate's other side.

Tactics

Dracolich: Unless the characters are doing something truly unusual, you should get a chance to make a *mesmerizing glare* attack every round. That's one of the most potent powers in your arsenal—and remember, the character that triggered the *mesmerizing glare* doesn't necessarily need to be in the blast area. You're also likely to get a chance to get a *runescribed retaliation*, but you can take only one immediate action per round. Unless the redirected attack from *runescribed retaliation* would be particularly potent, *mesmerizing glare* is a more effective choice.

Other than immediate actions, the runescribed dracolich uses standard dragon tactics: *breath weapon* when possible, melee otherwise. The dracolich's *bite* is particularly potent against stunned enemies, and with *mesmerizing glare*, the *breath weapon*, and *frightful presence*, you have no shortage of ways to stun the PCs.

Far Realm Gate Trap: The dracolich is most effective when it has enemies nearby (where it can use melee attacks, glare at them, breathe on them, and redirect attacks to them). The gate trap should keep characters away from the periphery of the room, and it also stuns, which sets up the dragon for extra damage from a bite.

Runescribed Dracolich, Consort of Tiamat **Level 29 Solo Controller**
Gargantuan natural magical beast (dragon, undead) XP 75,000
Initiative +22 **Senses** Perception +25; darkvision
HP 1,335; **Bloodied** 667
AC 45; **Fortitude** 45, **Reflex** 43, **Will** 41
Immune disease, fear, poison; **Resist** 40 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 10 radiant
Saving Throws +5
Speed 8, fly 10 (clumsy)
Action Points 2

Bite (standard, at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
Reach 4; +34 vs. AC; 2d10 + 10 damage. Against a stunned target, this attack deals an extra 4d8 necrotic damage.

Mesmerizing Glare (immediate interrupt, when an enemy makes a melee attack against the dracolich, at-will) ✦ **Fear**
Close blast 3; +32 vs. Will; the target is stunned until the end of the dracolich's next turn. *Miss:* The target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls against the dracolich until the end of the dracolich's next turn.

Runescribed Retaliation (immediate interrupt, when the runescribed dracolich is targeted by a ranged attack, at-will)
The runescribed dracolich makes an attack against the attacking creature; +34 vs. Will; on a hit, the runescribed dracolich redirects the attack to a target of its choice within 5 squares of it.

Blackfire (standard, recharge ⚅) ✦ **Fire, Necrotic**
Close blast 5; automatic hit; 2d12 + 8 necrotic damage, and ongoing 15 fire damage (save ends).

Breath Weapon (standard, recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Necrotic**
The blackfire dracolich breathes a coruscating blast of necrotic energy: close blast 20; +32 vs. Reflex; 3d12 + 8 necrotic damage, and the target is stunned until the end of the runescribed dracolich's next turn. *Miss:* Half damage, and the target is not stunned. *Hit or Miss:* The target loses any necrotic resistance it has (save ends).

Bloodied Breath (immediate reaction, when first bloodied, encounter)
The runescribed dracolich's *breath weapon* recharges, and the runescribed dracolich uses it immediately.

Glory of Tiamat (standard, while bloodied, encounter)
Close burst 5; +33 vs. Will; the target is pushed 3 squares, knocked prone, and dazed (save ends).

Frightful Presence (standard, encounter) ✦ **Fear**
Close burst 20; targets enemies; +32 vs. Will; the target is stunned until the end of the runescribed dracolich's next turn. *Aftereffect:* The target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls until the end of the encounter.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Draconic
Skills Arcana +24, Endurance +27, History +24, Insight +25, Intimidate +23, Religion +24
Str 31 (+24) **Dex** 26 (+22) **Wis** 22 (+20)
Con 27 (+22) **Int** 20 (+19) **Cha** 19 (+18)

Far Realm Gate	Level 26 Elite Blaster
Trap	XP 45,000

The gates flicker open to show horrifying, impossible vistas.

Trap: Every round, two of the gates (use 1d8 twice to determine which ones) reveal a passageway to the Far Realm. Nothing comes through the gate, but those who look at the horrors of the Far Realm put their sanity at risk.

Perception

✦ DC 29: The character sees a flicker indicating which two gates will open the following round.

Arcana

✦ DC 33: The character recognizes the Far Realm and knows it's not safe to look at.

Initiative +8

Trigger

The gates open and close at initiative point 0. They attack anyone standing within 4 squares instantly, and they make an opportunity attack against anyone moving within 4 squares of them while they're open.

Attack

Standard Action **Close** blast 4

Target: All creatures in blast

Attack: +28 vs. Will

Hit: 4d10 + 5 psychic damage and ongoing 5 psychic damage and stunned (save ends both). This is a fear effect.

Aftereffect: Dazed (save ends).

Countermeasures

✦ Thievery DC 37: A character can engage in a skill challenge to shut down a gate. Complexity 1 (4 successes before 3 failures). Success causes that gate to stay dark even when it would be randomly triggered. Failure causes the gate to explode (close burst 8, 4d10 + 5 radiant damage and stunned (save ends) to all creatures in burst). The third failure sucks the character into the Far Realm, where he remains until someone rescues him—an adventure in its own right.

✦ A character can attack the gate framework (AC 33, other defenses 29; hp 100; resist 15 all). When reduced to 0 hit points, the gate explodes in a close burst 8, as above.

Features of the Area:

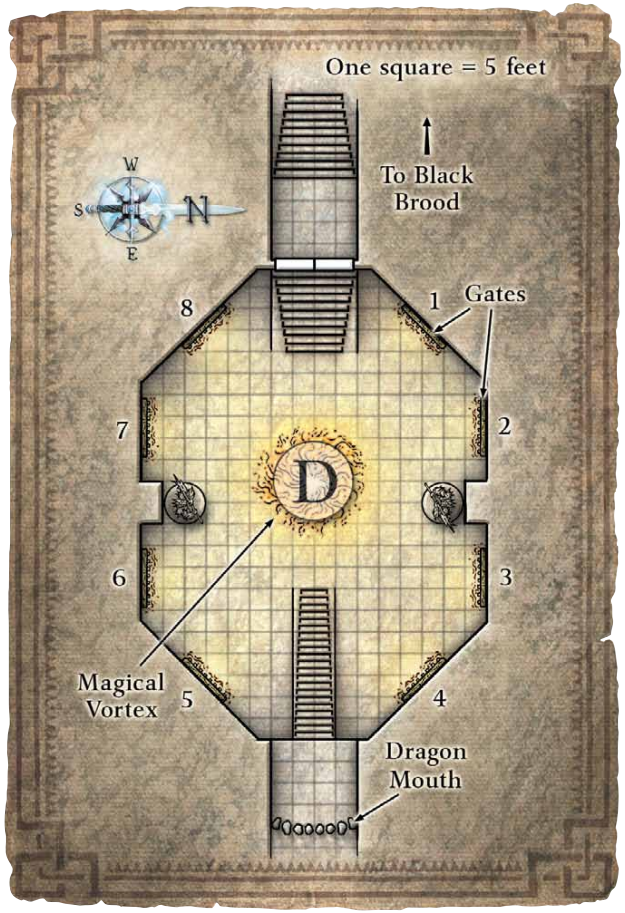
Illumination: The magical vortex illuminates this room brightly.

Magical Vortex: While it looks dangerous, it's just a visual effect. A DC 26 Arcana check is sufficient to realize that it's harmless. Because the vortex is translucent and swirls randomly, it provides concealment in the squares it covers.

Statues: Each statue is made of pure alabaster encrusted with diamonds. They're worth 100,000 gp each, but each one weighs several tons.

Gates: The gates don't lead anywhere unless the dracolich activates them with specific rituals. A DC 33 Arcana check is sufficient to adapt a Planar Portal ritual to use one of the gates instead of the usual circle. During the battle, the dracolich opens gates to the Far Realm (see the Far Realm Gate trap section).

Eggshells: If you're planning on a link to your next campaign (as described in the Aftermath section of this adventure), then mention that some eggshells are scattered at the base of one of the gates.



G8: Black Brood-Mother's Lair

Encounter Level 30 (101,000 XP)

Setup

1 Black Brood Mother (B)
Death strangler vines

The black brood mother had the largest cache of eggs, but so far she's hatched only ordinary wyrmlings from them.

When the PCs reach the entrance to the chamber, read:

You see a trench bisecting the chamber and an immense, obese black dragon lounging within it. Both ahead of and behind the dragon is a thin forest of twisted, denuded trees and black vines.

"Intruders . . . in my lair," she hisses. "Yet I suspect you do not know whose children you risk disturbing . . . mortal fools . . . ."

Perception Check
DC 28: *The vegetation twitches and moves slightly of its own volition.*
Nature Check
DC 33: *Those vines are clearly death strangler vines: motile, carnivorous plants.*

Just moving around in this cavern will be a challenge, because of the death strangler vines and the bulk of the brood mother herself.

Tactics

The brood mother begins by wallowing in the trench in the middle of the chamber. Once characters get stuck in the vines, she won't stay there long.

Brood Mother: Of all the brood mothers in this adventure, the black brood mother gains the most by staying mobile. She's too large for the death strangler vines to affect her, so she's happy to stand amid the vines and use *vitriolic spray* and her *breath weapon* until the characters come to her. Once they get stuck in the vines, she flies off to somewhere else and repeats the process.

Remember that the brood mother has an immediate reaction that triggers on a missed melee attack. Like all immediate actions, you can use it only once per turn.

Death Strangler Vines: Note that they attack immediately when heroes enter their squares, and all of them attack any creature they can reach during their initiative point as well.

Talking to the Brood Mother

This brood mother will try to negotiate and tempt the players even as she fights. This is more roleplaying flavor than an offer the PCs will seriously entertain, because the brood mother has little to offer beyond the promise to put in a good word with Tiamat. She'll try to tempt the heroes to give up on their assault and instead serve Tiamat and help her overcome "recent difficulties." That's laughably naive on the black brood mother's part, but she's been holed up in her lair laying eggs this whole time and is largely ignorant of how dire Tiamat's situation is.

Death Strangler Vines **Level 28 Blaster**
Trap XP 13,000

The vines lash out at anything that approaches.

Trap: When the trap is triggered, the vines grab intruders, hold them in place, and slowly squeeze the life out of them.

Perception
✦ DC 28: Just before a character enters the area with the vines, the vegetation twitches and slithers forward slightly.

Nature
✦ DC 33: The character recognizes the distinctive leaves of death strangler vines and knows what they're capable of.

Trigger
When a Huge or smaller enemy enters a square with vines, they animate and attack that creature with the following attack, but as an immediate reaction instead of a standard action. Then roll for the vines' initiative. They act each round on that turn, until no creature is within the trigger area.

Attack ✦ Necrotic
Immediate Reaction **Melee** 0
or Standard Action
or Opportunity Action
or Free Action
Target: One creature
Attack: +28 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d8 + 10 damage, and the target is restrained and takes ongoing 10 necrotic damage.

Countermeasures
✦ Athletics DC 28 or Acrobatics DC 28: A restrained character can use an escape action to free himself and end the necrotic damage.
✦ Each square of vines has AC 10, Reflex 10, Fortitude 28, and hp 200. When reduced to 0 hit points, the vines in that square are destroyed.

Black Brood Mother **Level 29 Solo Lurker**
Gargantuan natural magical beast (aquatic, dragon) XP 45,000
Initiative +27 **Senses** Perception +22; darkvision
HP 1,208; **Bloodied** 604
AC 46; **Fortitude** 42, **Reflex** 44, **Will** 38
Resist 30 acid
Saving Throws +5
Speed 10, fly 10 (hover), swim 10
Action Points 2

Bite (standard, at-will) ✦ **Acid**
Reach 4; +35 vs. AC; 2d8 + 9 damage, and ongoing 15 acid damage (save ends).

Claw (standard, at-will)
Reach 4; +35 vs. AC; 1d10 + 9 damage.

Double Attack (standard, at-will)
The dragon makes two *claw* attacks.

Tail Slash (immediate reaction, when a melee attack misses the dragon, at-will)
The dragon uses its tail to attack the enemy that missed it: reach 4; +35 vs. AC; 1d12 + 11 damage, and the target is pushed 3 squares.

Underbelly Crush (standard, at-will)
Targets an adjacent creature; +30 vs. Reflex; 1d12 +10 damage, and a Large or smaller target is grabbed, pulled 1 square into the dragon's space, and restrained. A creature trapped underneath the brood mother's bulk has line of sight and line of effect only to the brood mother, and no creatures have line of sight or line of effect to it. A creature that escapes the grab is no longer underneath the brood mother and no longer restrained; the character shifts to the nearest square that is not part of the brood mother's space. If the brood mother moves so that it no longer occupies the grabbed character's space, then the character is no longer grabbed or restrained. *Sustain Minor:* The brood mother sustains the grab, and the target takes 20 damage plus 10 acid damage.

Breath Weapon (standard, recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Acid**
Close blast 5; +31 vs. Reflex; 4d8 + 7 acid damage, and the target takes ongoing 30 acid damage and takes a -4 penalty to AC (save ends both).

Bloodied Breath (free, when first bloodied, encounter) ✦ **Acid**
The dragon's breath weapon recharges, and the dragon uses it immediately.

Frightful Presence (standard, encounter) ✦ **Fear**
Close burst 10; targets enemies; +31 vs. Will; the target is stunned until the end of the dragon's next turn. *Aftereffect:* The target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends).

Vitriolic Spray (standard, at-will) ✦ **Acid**
Close blast 5; +31 vs. Reflex; 2d10 + 7 acid damage, and the target is blinded until the end of the dragon's next turn. *Miss:* Half damage, and the target is not blinded.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Draconic
Skills Nature +22, Stealth +33
Str 26 (+22) **Dex** 30 (+24) **Wis** 18 (+18)
Con 22 (+20) **Int** 18 (+18) **Cha** 16 (+17)

The characters can certainly string the brood mother along, however, and doing so may earn them temporary mercy (if the black brood mother gets the upper hand in battle) or more information about the other inhabitants of Tiamat's lair.

Features of the Area

Illumination: This cavern has only the illumination the characters bring with them.

Ceiling: The ceiling of the cavern is 30 feet high.

Vegetation: The vegetation is difficult terrain, and it has the death strangler vines described below.

Eggs: There are 20 eggs submerged in the water. About half are inert, but the other half will hatch black dragon wyrmlings in 1d6 months.

Treasure: Treasure parcel H is submerged among the eggs.

Tree Trunks: The trees are blocking terrain. It's a DC 15 Athletics check to climb a tree; heroes can climb 20 feet up. If the brood mother moves through a square with a tree, she knocks it down effortlessly—it's effectively not there anymore.

Deep Water: The water is between 5 and 6 feet deep. It's considered difficult terrain, and creatures trying to fight in a deep water square suffer the penalties and restrictions of aquatic combat (described on p. 45 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*). Characters who can keep their heads above water (all but dwarves, halflings, and similar creatures) can walk on the bottom of the pool rather than swimming with the Athletics skill, if they wish. Gargantuan creatures like the brood mother ignore the water.

G9: Observatory

Encounter Level 30 (90,000 XP)

Setup

1 beholder ultimate tyrant (B)
Kinetic blast trap

This room has a divinatory purpose; Tiamat's fortune tellers and soothsayers use it for various rituals in an attempt to provide the Dragon Queen with oracular wisdom. Tiamat tends to eat unsuccessful soothsayers. The current master of the observatory has held this post for only a year, is regretting his recent prediction of Tiamat's triumph at the City of Brass, and would love to kill intruders to get back into the Dragon Queen's good graces.

When the characters reach the entrance to the chamber, read:

The walls of this room are covered in stars, but they're moving across the false sky faster than ordinary stars would. Golden bridges connect floating steel platforms, and there's a set of doors on the opposite end.

An enormous beholder swoops up from below. You can dimly make out the floor 120 feet below.

Perception Check
DC 23: *The bridges occasionally flicker out of existence for a fraction of a second.*

The characters will quickly realize that the bridges aren't to be trusted, but limiting themselves to the platforms will give the beholder a significant maneuverability advantage in this battle.

Tactics

This encounter is all about delivering the classic beholder experience one last time. Do that and you can't go wrong.

Beholder: It's tempting to just use *telekinesis ray*, *ray of attraction*, and *ray of repulsion*, but that doesn't make for a fun battle and will force the characters to fly, rendering the bridges irrelevant. Save those two rays for after the heroes have figured out how the bridges work or to force them off the platforms and onto the bridges where they're vulnerable.

The battle is the most fun when the heroes get to experience a variety of eye rays, so choose them based on which defense you're attacking, not on the specific effect. If you choose eye rays randomly, that wouldn't be the worst thing in the world. If nothing else, it would keep the characters guessing.

Force Bridges: They seem complex, but if you take a minute to write down the pattern at the beginning of the battle, you'll find it goes quickly. You'll turn on one set of bridges, turn off one set of bridges (perhaps sending characters plummeting to their doom), and make the push attacks on one set of bridges (which might also send heroes plummeting). It's 120 feet (and thus 12d10 damage) to the bottom.

Magic Force Bridge **Level 19 Blaster**
Trap XP 2,400

Bridges of golden magic force blink on and off, connecting and disconnecting the floating platforms to and from one another.

Trap: When the beholder reveals itself, the bridges start to cycle through their off-active-push-active cycle.

Perception
✦ DC 28: There seems to be a pattern to the timing: three rounds on, one round off.
✦ DC 33: There are faint clouds of dust that move on each bridge in the second round of the bridge being on, as if there's a wind there.

Arcana
✦ DC 33: There's a surge in kinetic energy at each bridge during the second round.

Initiative +8

Trigger
Once activated with a minor action from the beholder, roll 1d4 to determine which bridges will shut down first (1 = 1 and 5, 2 = 2 and 6, 3 = 3 and 7, 4 = 4 and 8). Then roll initiative for the bridges, and in the following round those bridges shut down. Each subsequent round at that initiative point, two more bridges close down (the next two numerically), and the bridges that were inactive become active again. Add two more bridges to the pattern until all have activated once (in the fourth round), then continue cycling through in order in the off-active-push-active cycle. For example, if the initial 1d4 throw is 3, then in the first round, bridges 3 and 7 shut off. In the second round, bridges 4 and 8 shut off and bridges 3 and 7 reactivate. In the third round, bridges 1 and 5 shut off, bridges 4 and 8 reactivate, and bridges 3 and 7 make their push attack. In the fourth round, bridges 2 and 6 shut off, bridges 1 and 5 turn back on, bridges 4 and 8 make a push attack, and bridges 3 and 7 remain active. In the fifth round, bridges 3 and 7 shut off, bridges 4 and 8 remain active, bridges 1 and 5 make a push attack, and bridges 2 and 6 turn back on again. This cycle repeats until the beholder is slain.

Attack (during a "push" round for that bridge)
Standard Action **Melee**
Target: All creatures on the bridge
Attack: +22 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 3d12 + 5 damage and push 3 squares and knock prone.
Effect: Target is pushed one square away from the center of the bridge and must make a saving throw to be prone and clinging to the edge; targets that fail take 12d10 damage.

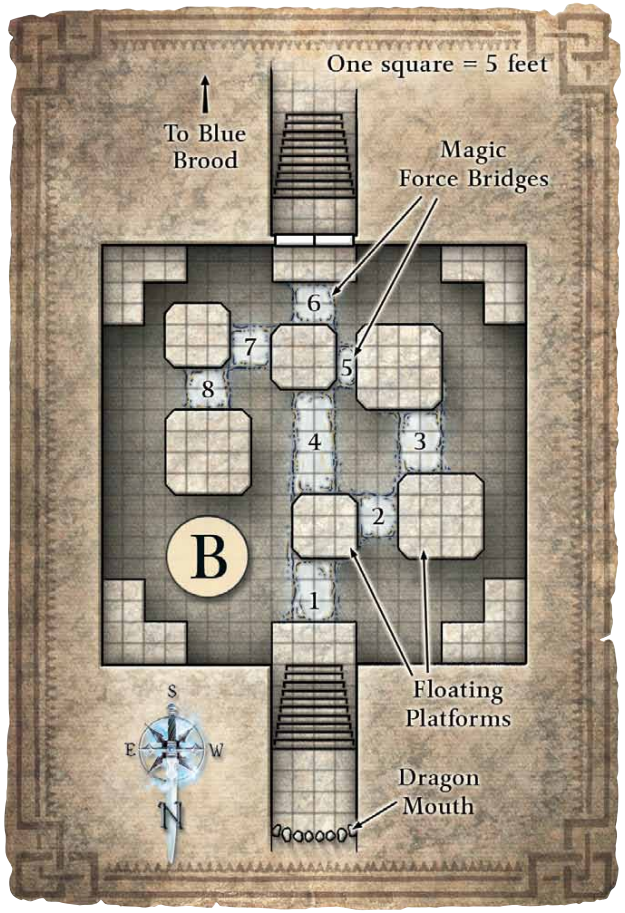
Effect (**during an "off" round for that bridge**)
Characters standing on the bridge when it deactivates fall, taking 12d10 damage when they hit the cavern floor. Creatures who are adjacent to a floating platform can attempt a saving throw; if they succeed, they can instead be prone in an unoccupied, adjacent platform square.

Countermeasures
✦ Arcana DC 33: An adjacent character can disable the trap with a successful check. The bridge no longer deactivates to cause characters to fall through and the whirlwind push effect ceases for the duration of the encounter.

Features of the Area

Illumination: The chamber is brightly lit by the starscapes—for characters who are standing on any of the platforms. Creatures on the bridges and down on the chamber floor see only the glow of the bridges, so the entire chamber is dimly lit for them. In other words, visible light depends not on the light source but on where the creature is standing.

Ceiling: The ceiling of the cavern is 30 feet above the platforms and 150 feet above the floor.



Platforms: Characters see different starscapes when standing on each platform, but the stars disappear from view as soon as the character steps off.

Chamber Floor: The floor is featureless stone 120 feet below the platforms. Unless the players insist on it, avoid moving the battle down—it's more fun on the platforms. At the bottom is a human skeleton and treasure parcel H.

Bridges: Described in the trap box on page 39.

Beholder Ultimate Tyrant **Level 29 Solo Artillery**
Huge aberrant magical beast XP 75,000

Initiative +20 **Senses** Perception +27; all-around vision, darkvision
HP 1,080; **Bloodied** 540
AC 41; **Fortitude** 38, **Reflex** 40, **Will** 42
Immune petrification
Saving Throws +5
Speed fly 8 (hover)
Action Points 2

Bite (standard, at-will)
+36 vs. AC; 3d8 + 10 damage.

Central Eye (minor 1/round, at-will)
Ranged 30; +34 vs. Fortitude; the target is dazed and slowed (save ends both). *First Failed Saving Throw:* The target is stunned (save ends). *Miss:* The target is slowed (save ends).

Eyes of the Beholder (free, when an enemy starts its turn within 5 squares of the beholder, at-will)
The ultimate tyrant uses *eye ray* against the triggering enemy.

Spasmodic Rays (when first bloodied and again when the beholder ultimate tyrant drops to 0 hit points)
The ultimate tyrant uses a random *eye ray* attack against each enemy within 10 squares.

Eye Ray (standard, at-will)
The beholder ultimate tyrant uses two *eye ray* powers chosen from the list below. The origin square of each area burst must be centered on a different enemy. Using *eye ray* does not provoke opportunity attacks.
1—Madness Ray (Charm, Psychic): Area burst 1 within 10; +32 vs. Will; 2d8 + 7 psychic damage, and the target must make a basic attack against its nearest ally as a free action.
2—Unraveling Ray: Area burst 1 within 10; +32 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 7 damage, and the target takes ongoing 10 damage (save ends).
First Failed Saving Throw: The target takes 1d10 damage.
Second Failed Saving Throw: The target takes 2d10 damage.
Third Failed Saving Throw: The target takes 3d10 damage, and the ongoing damage from this power ends.
3—Withering Ray (Necrotic): Area burst 1 within 10; +32 vs. Fortitude; 2d8 + 7 damage, and the target takes ongoing 10 necrotic damage (save ends). *First Failed Saving Throw:* The target is weakened (save ends).
4—Burning Ray (Fire): Area burst 1 within 10; +32 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 7 fire damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls and ongoing 10 fire damage (save ends both).
5—Telekinesis Ray: Area burst 1 within 10; +32 vs. Fortitude; the beholder slides the target 8 squares, and the target is knocked prone.
6—Frost Ray (Cold): Area burst 1 within 10; +32 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 7 cold damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to saving throws until the end of the beholder's next turn.
7—Petrifying Ray: Area burst 1 within 10; +32 vs. Fortitude; the target is slowed (save ends).
First Failed Saving Throw: The target is immobilized instead of slowed (save ends).
Second Failed Saving Throw: The target is petrified.
8—Disintegrate Ray: Area burst 1 within 10; +32 vs. Fortitude; 2d10 + 7 damage, and the target takes ongoing 15 damage (save ends). *Aftereffect:* Ongoing 10 damage (save ends).
9—Ray of Attraction: Area burst 1 within 10; +32 vs. Reflex; the target takes a -5 penalty to all defenses, and at the start of the target's turn the beholder pulls it 2 squares (save ends both). *Aftereffect:* The target takes a -2 penalty to all defenses (save ends).
10—Ray of Repulsion: Area burst 1 within 10; +32 vs. Reflex; the target takes a -2 penalty to Reflex, and at the start of the target's turn the ultimate tyrant pushes it 6 squares (save ends both). *Aftereffect:* The target is pushed 3 squares at the start of its turn (save ends).

Antimagic Field
A beholder ultimate tyrant takes no damage from zone effects.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Deep Speech, Draconic, Common
Str 22 (+20) **Dex** 22 (+20) **Wis** 27 (+22)
Con 30 (+24) **Int** 34 (+26) **Cha** 38 (+28)

G10: Blue Brood-Mother's Lair

Encounter Level 30 (114,000 XP)

Setup

1 blue brood mother (B)
Tornado alley trap

The blue brood mother has the largest clutch of eggs within her and already birthed at the moment, so she's more cautious about putting what could potentially be Dragon Queen heirs at risk.

When the PCs reach the entrance to the chamber, read:

This long cavern has a dusty floor and rough but otherwise featureless stone floor. At the far end is an alcove atop a cliff where a gargantuan blue dragon rests. Its belly is swollen with eggs.

As it roars, wind picks up in the chamber and the dust devils at the base of the cliff take on darker, more ominous forms.

Perception Check
DC 33: *Those dust devils are growing into full-fledged tornados.*
Dungeoneering Check
DC 28: *There's no natural explanation for wind in this chamber.*

The cyclones that sweep throughout this room don't affect the brood mother, but they make it quite difficult for the characters to get near the dragon and stay near her.

Tornado Alley **Level 30 Minion Blaster**
Trap XP 4,750

When this trap is triggered, cyclones head from the dragon's perch toward you.

Trap: As soon as the brood mother notices the characters, the trap triggers, and the cyclones continue until she is slain.

Perception
✦ DC 33: The dust is moving at the base of the cliff.

Dungeoneering
✦ DC 28: The air in this chamber seems far too restless for an underground cavern.

Initiative +2 **Speed** 1d6 + 8 (Roll at the start of each cyclone's move)

Trigger
The brood mother triggers the first cyclone, which appears and moves at its initiative point during the following round. Each round after that, move all existing cyclones at that initiative point, then place two new cyclones at the base of the cliff, rolling 1d8 to determine each cyclone's path. If both rolls are the same, only one new cyclone appears that round. If both new cyclones appear in the same origin space, place the second one directly ahead of the first. Each cyclone fills a space that is 2 squares by 2 squares.

Move
When a cyclone moves, it follows the path that matches the number rolled when it was created. Cyclones can squeeze without penalty and can end their turns squeezed.

Attack
Standard Action or Immediate Interrupt
Area trample attack in squares entered by the cyclone
Trample: Each turn, the cyclone moves its speed and enters creatures' spaces. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks. The cyclone can end its move in an occupied space. Huge or smaller creatures in a cyclone's space at the start of their turns can act normally, but those squares are difficult terrain and the whirling dust within the cyclone blocks line of sight. When a cyclone enters a creature's space, the cyclone makes a trample attack. If a creature enters a square of the cyclone's space, the cyclone makes a trample attack as a free action. Gargantuan creatures such as the brood mother ignore the cyclone's effects.
Trample Attack: +17 vs. Reflex
Hit: 3d10 + 6 damage, and the target is pushed 8 squares (always into a different cyclone lane) and knocked prone.
Miss: Half damage and the target is knocked prone

Countermeasures
✦ Acrobatics DC 23: A character can voluntarily go prone as an interrupt action, forcing the cyclone to miss (and thus taking only half damage from the cyclone's attack).
✦ Acrobatics DC 28: A character pushed by the cyclone isn't knocked prone.

Tactics

When you run this battle, try to keep the cyclones active and interesting for as long as possible.

Brood Mother: The blue brood mother is content to view this battle as a shooting gallery, using *breath weapon* and *lightning burst* from its perch to the north while the characters get battered and blown by the cyclones. When the heroes finally reach the brood mother, it will fly down to the middle of the map and wait for the PCs there, repeating this tactic as often as it's effective. The brood mother is big enough that it can ignore the cyclones, so it doesn't really care where it stands.

The brood mother's attacks are likewise more challenging when used in conjunction with the cyclones. Save *frightful presence* and *thunderclap* for a moment when cyclones are bearing down on several characters at once. If they're stunned, they can't avoid being tossed about. Using *gore* to push a character into a cyclone, which will then push that character farther away, is also effective.

Cyclones: With a little luck, you can set up chains of cyclones that bounce a hero far away from the action. If one cyclone pushes a character into another cyclone, that cyclone triggers and can then push the character even further. Expect jaws to drop the first time you pull off *that* trick.

Also remember that the cyclones block line of sight.

Blue Brood Mother **Level 30 Solo Artillery**
Gargantuan natural magical beast (dragon) XP 65,000
Initiative +18 **Senses** Perception +23; darkvision
HP 1,302; **Bloodied** 651
AC 44; **Fortitude** 48, **Reflex** 42, **Will** 42
Resist 30 lightning
Saving Throws +5
Speed 10, fly 12 (hover)
Action Points 2

Gore (standard, at-will) ✦ **Lightning**
Reach 4; +36 vs. AC; 2d8 + 11 plus 2d6 lightning damage, and the target is pushed 3 squares and knocked prone.

Claw (standard, at-will)
Reach 4; +34 vs. AC; 2d6 + 11 damage.

Draconic Fury (standard, at-will)
The dragon makes a *gore* attack and two *claw* attacks.

Underbelly Crush (standard, at-will)
Targets an adjacent creature; +30 vs. Reflex; 1d12 +10 damage, and a Large or smaller target is grabbed, pulled 1 square into the dragon's space, and restrained. A creature trapped underneath the brood mother's bulk has line of sight and line of effect only to the brood mother, and no creatures have line of sight or line of effect to it. A creature that escapes the grab is no longer underneath the brood mother and no longer restrained; the character shifts to the nearest square that is not part of the brood mother's space. If the brood mother moves so that it no longer occupies the grabbed character's space, then the character is no longer grabbed or restrained. *Sustain Minor:* The brood mother sustains the grab, and the target takes 20 damage plus 10 lightning damage.

Breath Weapon (standard, recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Lightning**
The dragon targets up to three creatures with its lightning breath; the first target must be within 20 squares of the dragon, the second target within 10 squares of the first, and the third target within 10 squares of the second; +35 vs. Reflex; 3d12 + 23 lightning damage. *Miss:* Half damage. This attack does not provoke opportunity attacks.

Bloodied Breath (free, when first bloodied, encounter) ✦ **Lightning**
The dragon's *breath weapon* recharges, and the dragon uses it immediately. This attack does not provoke opportunity attacks.

Frightful Presence (standard, encounter) ✦ **Fear**
Close burst 10; targets enemies; +35 vs. Will; the target is stunned until the end of the dragon's next turn. *Aftereffect:* The target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends).

Thunderclap (standard, at-will) ✦ **Thunder**
Close burst 3; +35 vs. Fortitude; 2d10 + 9 thunder damage, and the target is stunned until the end of the blue dragon's next turn. *Critical Hit:* As above, except that the target is stunned (save ends).

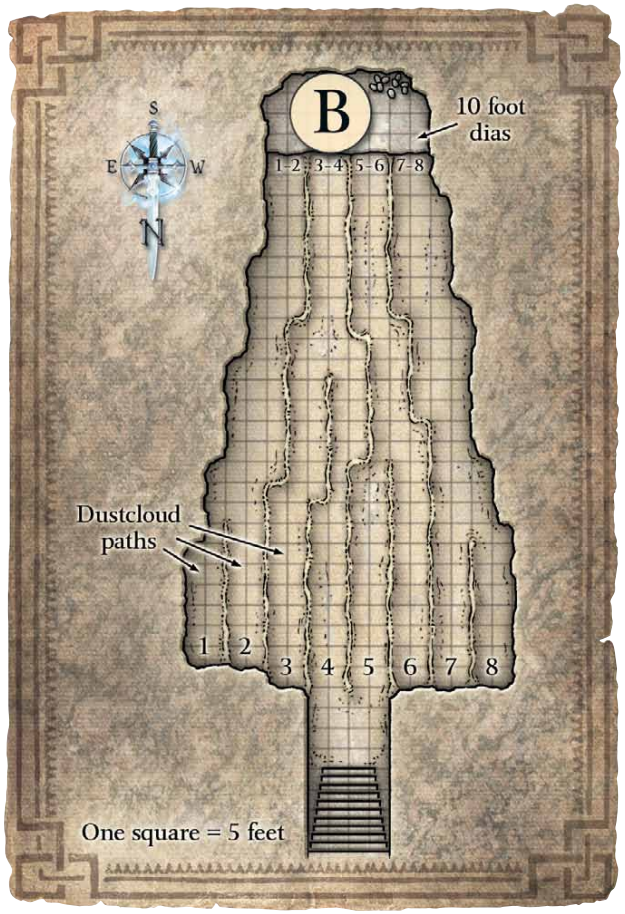
Lightning Burst (standard, at-will) ✦ **Lightning**
Area burst 4 within 20; +35 vs. Reflex; 5d6 + 9 lightning damage. *Miss:* Half damage.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Draconic
Skills Athletics +34, Insight +23, Nature +23
Str 31 (+25) **Dex** 19 (+19) **Wis** 18 (+19)
Con 26 (+23) **Int** 17 (+18) **Cha** 17 (+18)

Talking to the Brood Mother

This brood mother will react strongly to threats made against its eggs by characters who are up in the alcove. If characters get there while the dragon is on the cavern floor, the brood mother will probably give chase. It will warn the heroes that each egg contains "the power of the Dragon Queen herself . . . power far beyond what you can even fathom . . . "

The blue brood mother delights in playing with her food, so to speak. She'll ridicule characters who are thrown about by the cyclones and taunt them after every missed attack.



Features of the Area

Illumination: This cavern has only the illumination the PCs bring with them.

Ceiling: The ceiling of the cavern is 30 feet high.

Alcove: The blue brood mother starts here.

Cliffs: It takes a DC 15 Athletics check to ascend these 20-foot-tall cliffs at half speed, granting combat advantage during the climb, as described on p. 182 of the *Player's Handbook*. Creatures that take damage while climbing must immediately make a DC 15 Athletics check (DC 20 if the damage made the climber bloodied) or fall. Creatures about to fall can, as an immediate action, attempt a DC 20 Athletics check (with an additional +1 DC per point of damage) to make a last-ditch grab at the cliff face.

Eggs: There are 25 eggs atop the plateau. About half are inert, but the other half will hatch blue dragon wyrmlings in 1d6 months.

Treasure: Treasure parcels I and J are scattered amid the eggs, along with 200,000 gp in platinum and opal jewelry.

G11: Tiamat's Platform

Encounter Level 30 (235,000 XP)

Setup

Tiamat (T)

This platform is where Tiamat spends most of her time, scrying on her erstwhile allies and negotiating, cajoling, or threatening them remotely. Getting here is difficult and deadly unless the characters have disabled the disintegration beams from the dragon heads in the lower fountain chamber.

When the heroes reach the entrance to the chamber, read:

Once you ascend past the lip of the platform, you see Tiamat in all her five-headed horror. Ten baleful eyes gaze at you, the hate within them almost palpable. Surrounding her on the rim of the platform are eight shimmering energy fields.

"You've thwarted my plans," says the blue head.

"You returned Bahamut to life," says the red.

"You broke my army at its moment of triumph," says the black.

"You've slain my exarchs," says the green.

"And now, you've invaded my innermost lair," says the white.

"Cherish this moment," say all five in unison, "because this moment is your high-water mark. Now, your pain, your fall . . . will fuel my rise, my rebirth!"

Perception Check
DC 28: *The shimmering energy fields are translucent, but they seem quite solid.*

Arcana Check
DC 33: *The energy fields serve as viewscreens for scrying or other divinatory purposes.*

This encounter appears elementally simple, but Tiamat is a complex monster to control in battle. It should place a memorable capstone on the campaign if you hold nothing back.

Tactics

The key to delivering an exciting fight with Tiamat is to mix it up and never become predictable. Tiamat constantly changes tactics, even when things appear to be going her way. She has a formidable bag of tricks; use as many as possible.

General Tips: Don't forget the structural basics of Tiamat as a monster: the aura that deals 25 damage whenever anyone starts or moves within 10 squares and resist 15 against any of her five damage types.

Tiamat has two key encounter powers. Use *frightful majesty* as soon as possible. Once its effects have worn off, use *tail sting* against a character that doesn't have a strong Will defense. At this stage of the adventure, a dominated hero can wreak havoc.

Breath Weapons: *Chromatic breath* is available sometime in the second round (probably right away, unless the characters employed stuns to keep one or more heads from acting). Thereafter it recharges on a 6; use it whenever it's available. Breath weapons from the individual heads are encounter powers, and they're often weaker than the other action a head can take. Use them only when the heroes cluster together or it's otherwise advantageous.

Individual Heads: The black head's *vitriolic spray* is an effective breath weapon in all but name, and it's at-will. The blue head's *gore* is best used to knock a PC off the platform (possibly killing them and certainly taking them out of the fray for a few rounds). The *dominating gaze* from the green head should be used every round; there's no ally as effective as a helpful enemy. The red head's *bite* is a devastating melee attack, especially if you can hit the same character multiple times. The white head has a relatively ordinary *bite* and a rather mundane *breath weapon*, so when you use a standard action to move, try to do so during the white head's turn.

Falling: The blue dragon head's *gore* attack can push characters off the platform. Even level 30 characters will be killed by a 650-foot fall if they don't have some means to mitigate it (flight, a teleport reaction, *winged boots*). Even if they survive, they might have no timely way to get back to the battle. By this point in their careers and the adventure, it's possible that every character in the party will be capable of flight—how else did they get up here, anyway? (The level 20 Overland Flight ritual from *Dragon* #366 is especially useful in this regard.) While we don't promote the idea of DMs pulling their punches, this is the last battle these characters will ever have, and no one wants to sit out the climax of their career and destiny because they fell down. Characters get a saving throw to avoid falling and to land prone on the edge instead, but even that leaves a 45 percent chance of going over and out.

The point is, *use this push attack judiciously*! Timing and targeting are everything. Definitely push characters that can fly right off the platform, and shove characters that can't fly up to the edge if they're 4 squares in (then make threats like, "next turn, you're going over!"). Once it's clear that the *gore* attack is a potential game-ender for any vulnerable character, players ought to get the message and keep themselves

at least 3 squares from the edge. Sometimes this will mean giving up an attack after being pushed in order to spend two move actions standing up and moving away from the edge; remind players of this if someone looks tempted to take a chance and test your good will, or remind them that an action point can get them out of danger.

Under no circumstances should you let players think that you won't push them to certain doom. If someone is determined to be foolish, you may find yourself backed into a corner with no believable way out other than to end their game. If that's the case, then let the chips and the adventurers fall where they may.

Here's one last option for DMs with a real flair for the dramatic. The standard rule for falling is that a character hits bottom immediately. That's fine for typical falls, but this plunge is an eighth of a mile! A D&D combat round is 6 seconds long, and a body falls just 576 feet in 6 seconds (but it takes less than half a second to travel those last 74 feet . . .). That means a falling character won't technically hit the ground until the same initiative point for Tiamat comes around again on the following turn. The character has one full turn to try to save himself by, say, activating *Bahamut's golden canary* to transform into a gold dragon beneath him or, if the dragon is already summoned, to command it to swoop down and catch him. Alternatively, another hero who can fly could dive off the platform and overtake the falling character in grand cinematic style, catching him and arresting his plunge just feet above the floor. Neither of these things is especially realistic or even truly within the rules, but they're creative solutions that ought to be rewarded and they're tremendously dramatic. No one will ever forget this battle if it involves such a heroic rescue, and that's the real goal!

Discorporation: Normally, Tiamat discorporates when bloodied, thus removing herself from battle and preserving her life. This fight takes place at the heart of Tiamat's domain and seat of her power. She will not discorporate here, but fights to the death.

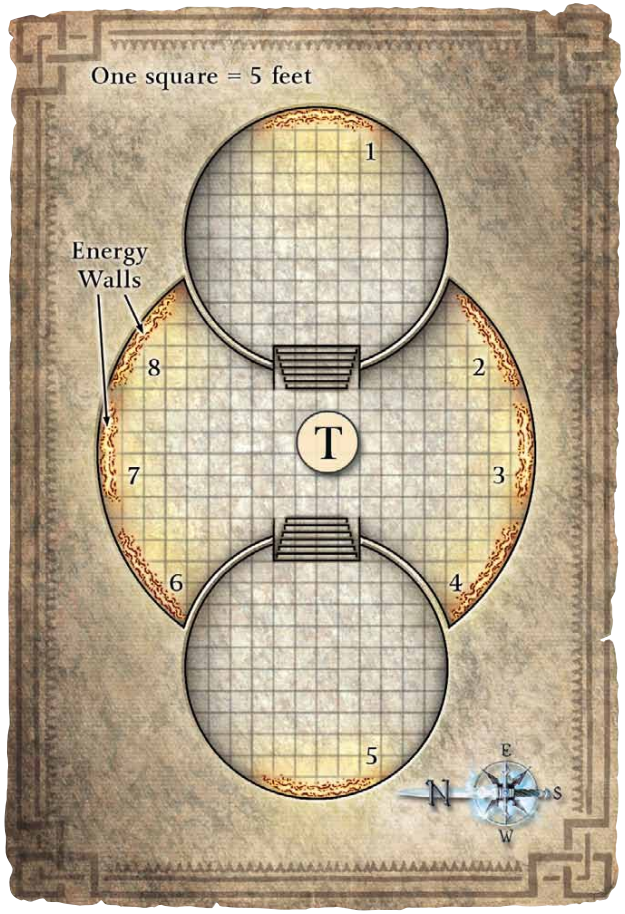
Features of the Area

Illumination: This cavern is brightly lit by the flame geyser below the floating platform.

Ceiling: The ceiling of the cavern is 150 feet above the platform.

Platform: It's a long way down for creatures that get knocked off the platform: 650 feet, which means 65d10 falling damage.

Energy Screens: While active, these screens are physical barriers that act like normal walls. Every round at initiative point 0, randomly choose an energy screen. That screen will depict a moment of heroic triumph from previous adventures in the *Scales of War* adventure path, then disappear. (You collected and these moments in the "Preparing the Adventure" section.) This reminds the players of how far they've come and it demoralizes Tiamat—but it also makes it easier for Tiamat to shove characters over the platform edge as the walls disappear.



Tiamat **Level 35 Solo Brute**
Huge immortal magical beast (dragon) XP 235,000
Initiative see quintuple actions **Senses** Perception +29; darkvision
Tiamat's Aura (Acid, Cold, Fire, Lightning, Poison) aura 10; any creature that enters the aura or starts its turn within the aura takes 25 acid, cold, fire, lightning, and poison damage.
HP 1,610; **Bloodied** 805; see also *bloodied breath* and *discorporation*
AC 51; **Fortitude** 51, **Reflex** 48, **Will** 49
Immune attacks by creatures of lower than 20th level
Resist 15 acid, 15 cold, 15 fire, 15 lightning, 15 poison
Saving Throws +5; whenever an attack applies an effect to Tiamat that a save can end, she immediately rolls a saving throw. Tiamat also makes saving throws at the end of each of her turns as normal.
Speed 10, fly 15 (hover), teleport 5
Action Points 5; each head can use only 1 action point, and Tiamat can spend an action point only once per round.

Claw (standard; at-will) **Fire**
Reach 3; +38 vs. AC; 4d10 + 12 damage.

Tail Sting (standard; encounter) **Charm**
Reach 4; +39 vs. AC; 4d10 + 12 damage, and Tiamat makes a secondary attack against the same target. *Secondary Attack:* +42 vs. Will; the target is dominated (save ends).

Chromatic Breath (standard; recharge ⚅) **Acid, Cold, Fire, Lightning, Poison**
Can be used only after each head has acted at least once; close burst 30; +38 vs. Reflex; 10d8 acid, cold, fire, lightning, and poison damage, and the target takes ongoing 25 acid, fire, and poison damage and is slowed (save ends both). *Aftereffect:* The target is slowed (save ends).

Bloodied Breath (free, when first bloodied; encounter) **Acid, Cold, Fire, Lightning, Poison**
Tiamat's *chromatic breath* recharges, and she uses it immediately.

Frightful Majesty (minor; encounter) **Fear**
Close burst 20; targets enemies; +38 vs. Will; the target is stunned until the end of Tiamat's next turn. *Aftereffect:* The target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends).

Quintuple Actions
Tiamat does not roll initiative. Her heads have set initiative counts of 45, 40, 35, 30, and 25 (Tiamat chooses the order each round). She cannot delay or ready actions. Each head can activate once per round on its initiative count to take a standard action and a minor action. Tiamat's ability to take immediate actions refreshes on each head's activation.

Discorporation
Tiamat will not discorporate in this battle. This is a fight to the death.

Quintuple Brain
Each time Tiamat becomes dazed or stunned, she loses her next head activation instead. Multiple such effects do not stack.

Black Dragon Head Only

Vitriolic Spray (standard; at-will) **Acid**
Close blast 5; +38 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 10 acid damage, and the target is blinded (save ends). *Miss:* Half damage, and the target is not blinded.

Breath Weapon (standard; encounter) **Acid**
Close blast 5; +37 vs. Reflex; 4d8 + 12 acid damage, and the target takes ongoing 30 acid damage and a -4 penalty to AC (save ends both).

Blue Dragon Head Only

Gore (standard; at-will) **Lightning**
Reach 3; +40 vs. AC; 2d8 + 12 damage plus 2d8 lightning damage, and the target is pushed 3 squares and knocked prone.

Breath Weapon (standard; encounter) **Lightning**
Tiamat targets up to three creatures with her lightning breath; the first target must be within 20 squares of Tiamat, the second target within 10 squares of the first, and the third target within 10 squares of the second; +39 vs. Reflex; 4d10 + 12 lightning damage, and one of the target's acid, cold, fire, lightning, or poison resistance is negated (Tiamat's choice; save ends). This attack does not provoke opportunity attacks.

Green Dragon Head Only

Dominating Gaze (standard; at-will) **Charm**
Ranged 20; +38 vs. Will; the target is dominated (save ends).

Breath Weapon (standard; encounter) **Poison**
Close blast 5; +38 vs. Fortitude; 3d12 + 12 poison damage, and the target takes ongoing 20 poison damage and is slowed (save ends both). *Aftereffect:* The target is slowed (save ends).

Red Dragon Head Only

Bite (standard; at-will) **Fire**
Reach 3; +40 vs. AC; 8d8 + 12 fire damage, and the target loses 1d4 healing surges.

Breath Weapon (standard; encounter) **Fire**
Close blast 5; +38 vs. Reflex; 5d12 + 12 fire damage. *Miss:* Half damage.

White Dragon Head Only

Bite (standard; at-will) **Cold**
Reach 3; +38 vs. AC; 6d12 + 12 cold damage.

Breath Weapon (standard; encounter) **Cold**
Close blast 5; +38 vs. Reflex; 9d6 + 12 cold damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls until the end of this head's next turn.

AFTERMATH

When Tiamat dies, the platform starts slowly sinking toward the ground. At the halfway point, Bahamut appears in his full draconic glory. Any remaining canaries flutter over to him and become full-fledged gold dragons that bow before him. Bahamut lifts one talon, and the characters are fully healed and recover from all conditions.

"You have the thanks of a god . . . you have the thanks of all, all across the many planes, all who strive for good.

"Yet I wonder whether you understand the enormity of your deed. Come! Grasp my wings. I'll show you just what you've wrought."

Bahamut is a god, so he can fly easily with the characters lying prone and facedown on his wings, grasping the leading edges.

With a silver flash, Tiamat's Lair disappears and you find yourself flying over the town of Rivenroar, where all this started what seems like forever ago. Tiamat circles lower and lower over a particularly fine manor on the edge of town.

"That belongs to Magister Tulm," Bahamut intones. "He's well into his eighth decade of life, and he's amassed a fortune providing advice and counsel to various dukes and high priests . . . a fortune so great that he could never spend it all. So look!"

As you watch, an old man heaves a sack onto the back of a wagon, wipes his brow, then clambers into the front of the wagon.

"Magister Tulm has just realized that he has more money than he'll ever need. He's pulled his extra wealth out of his cellar—a cellar replete with fiendish traps, by the way—and he's going to distribute it in the town square."

What it means to have slain the goddess of greed, wealth, and envy is probably dawning on the players at this point. But try to get through the following vignettes without confirming their suspicions.

Another flash, and you're high above another familiar place: the city of Overlook. Bahamut soars to the town's outskirts, where you see a farmer mending a hole in a pasture fence.

"A simple, pastoral scene, but consider this . . . Farmer Collob comes to this gap every day to look at the thoroughbred horses in his neighbor's pasture. How he wished he could have horses like that! Now Farmer Collob is fixing the fence so he can't peer through it anymore. Not because he's given up hope, but because he no longer envies his neighbor."

One more vignette, and then Bahamut will be in a more conversational mood.

There's another silver flash, and you find yourself flying over Hestavar. Bahamut lands atop his own temple.

"See my own temple. My priests have melted down much of the gold filigree that decorates—nay, obfuscates!—the temple interior. We're saving some for a rainy day, but the rest we're giving away to our brethren at the temples of Pelor, Erathis, and Ioun, whose temples were damaged while I was away."

With another flash, the heroes find themselves in Bahamut's chambers in Celestia.

Bahamut regards you kindly with his platinum eyes. "When you killed Tiamat, you didn't just defeat a god. You defeated the very wellspring of greed and envy.

"This doesn't mean the end of money, but gold coins are now merely a medium of exchange. No one wants gold coins or other riches for their own sake. That's why Magister Tulm gives away his extra wealth: He can no longer fathom a reason to keep it. It's not strictly out of the goodness of his heart, but because he no longer has the concept of greed.

"Farmer Collob is still fascinated with thoroughbred horses. It's just that he doesn't despise his neighbor for having horses that he himself lacks. That envy no longer poisons life on both sides of that fence. What's more, it's likely that his neighbor will sell one of those horses to Collob for no more than he'd charge for a common plow horse, because he, too, sees no reason to keep something to himself when it means more to someone else.

"Good and evil alike are affected by the end of greed and envy—which you saw in Hestavar. Even bulwarks of virtue like the temple of Bahamut are not immune to greed."

Bahamut gives a low snort that might be a chuckle, might be a cough.

"There's still evil in the world, of course. The tree of evil has multiple roots . . . not just greed. But you've fundamentally changed the world forever, heroes. I encourage you to visit it and see what you've done before . . . moving on."

At this point, Bahamut's role in the adventure is over, though he'll continue to praise the PCs and answer questions about what it all means. Shake your players' hands, engage in some back-and-forth about how the characters fulfill their epic destinies, and congratulate yourself on a campaign well run. Our authors may have set the foundation, but the guy at the head of the table was *you*, and you've accomplished something every bit as epic as your players.

Epic Destinies

One final thing remains for you to do: Go around the table and ask each player what ultimately happens to their character—how their epic destiny is fulfilled. Each epic destiny explains (often in the "Immortality" section) what happens after your final quest, but use that explanation as the starting point for this moment, not the final word.

Some players will want to briefly roleplay the moment when they become gods themselves, when they die and pass into the great beyond, or when they settle down to govern a nation or a church. Try to make each last "moment in the sun" special for the player. Give each character a final sendoff that they can be proud of and reminisce about years hence.

Your Next Campaign

If you're like most DMs, you're probably already thinking about your next campaign. Here are a couple of seeds you can plant which will grow and blossom in whatever you have up your sleeve next.

Tiamat's Replacement: Demigods scheming to "adopt" Tiamat's portfolio of greed and envy could form the basis for a campaign all its own. If you want to carry over something specific from this adventure, simply put some eggshells in the gate chamber (G7). That will suggest to perceptive players that at least one of the brood mother eggs hatched and escaped. Is it truly a five-headed child of Tiamat? Only your next campaign knows for sure.

Awakening the Dragons: As written, Tiamat's death merely throws chromatic dragons into disarray, exposing their many seething rivalries. As the patron god of chromatic dragons, Tiamat may have had connections beyond the symbolic. Her death could mean something far more fundamental.

In your next campaign, you could start with a world where all the chromatic dragons are either utterly gone or deeply slumbering. Various cults and other villains are trying to restore or reawaken the chromatic dragons, and the heroes are trying to prevent their return to the world.

Artifacts for the Next World: This option breaks the fourth wall a bit, but at the conclusion of this adventure, you can have Bahamut say upon his return to Celestia.

"You have changed our universe for the better, but I suspect other worlds will need . . . an inspiration, if you will."

With a single talon, Bahamut points to a well in the floor of an alcove.

"That well leads to a place beyond what is known, beyond all our planes, beyond all our gods. Even I know nothing of it. But I wonder . . . if you send some of your more potent items down the well, will they gladden the hearts of good's defenders in that world as well?"

In your next campaign, the gifts your PCs give to the well can wind up anywhere, transformed by the journey into full-fledged artifacts or powered-down into forms more appropriate for low-level treasure troves. In either case, they will form a familiar tie to distant legends that the players created themselves.

About the author

David Noonan has an extensive list of RPG credits, including *Martial Power*, *Scepter Tower of Spellgard*, and contributions to the 4th edition core rules. He lives in Washington state with his wife and two children.

There are many strange places beyond the great wall, that edifice which has spawned a thousand stories. But perhaps none are so strange as the place that adventurers call "the glass forest." Those few who have returned from journeys in the great valley tell of the keening that arises near this strange locale when the wind blows to the east, as if a thousand wind chimes had been set in motion. Some stories even speak of a strange shrine within this glass forest, but those are only whispers told to someone who's willing to buy the next pint.

HEROIC
1-10

The Shrine of Glass-Spire Forest

A Chaos Scar Adventure for 2nd-level characters.

By Cal Moore
cartography by Sean MacDonald

"The Shrine of Glass-Spire Forest" is a Chaos Scar Side Trek/adventure designed for five characters of 2nd level. This scenario consists of a skill challenge and two encounters, so you can run it in the Chaos Scar campaign or as a short stand-alone adventure.

Adventure Background

Long ago, a meteor fell from the heavens and crashed into the world, carving a long valley into the earth in its fury. The energies released warped the valley, leaving bizarre terrain along with shards of meteorite scattered in its wake before finally coming to rest at the head of the valley. The meteorite's energies attracted many powerful creatures. The region became a place of terror and warfare, for the those who controlled the meteorite or its shards gained great power. For this reason, an ancient king had the valley walled off to contain the horrors.

The seal was not perfect, and over millennia the land changed, allowing monsters to continue entering the valley or to range out from it and raid nearby lands. In time, the area was seen as a proving ground and an opportunity for adventurers, whether by destroying the monsters or gaining fame and wealth from the hoards such creatures acquired (or, for a lucky few, by acquiring a meteorite shard). Eventually, the bravest adventurers began going beyond the wall, and a few even returned alive with basic maps of the land beyond and tales of fierce creatures and strange places. One such story tells of the Glass-Spire Forest.

Not far from the wall, near one of the existing gaps leading into the valley, the meteorite caused the earth and stone of the valley floor to undergo a transformation as it passed, pulling the land upward into spires of sharp-edged brown- and gray-colored glass. In this location, a shard broke away from the meteorite to land among the newly formed glass spires, where it burrowed into the ground. After settling, the shard's alien energies were such that the glass spires continued to grow, slowly like living trees, and thus the Glass-Spire Forest was created.

In time, a dolgaunt sorcerer named Xennul discovered the place. Sensing the power of the shard, Xennul used a magic ritual to construct a domed, glass shrine around the shard within the center of the glass forest. The shard continued to support the forest but also allowed Xennul to tap into its power for foul purposes. To that end, Xennul used the shard's energy to warp a nearby nest of insectoid creatures

into aberrant glass guardians to protect the forest and shrine. They were inadequate, however; soon after, more powerful creatures arrived, and they took the shard and killed Xennul within its own shrine.

With the shard removed, the Glass-Spire Forest stopped growing, but traces of the shard's power still remain in the area. The forest has become a maze of standing and shattered spires, making travel through it difficult and dangerous. The glass guardians have also survived, and they attack any who intrude upon the shrine. In addition, although Xennul was killed, it handled the meteorite shard long enough that a measure of its essence was imprinted within the shrine. This foul presence still lurks there and is drawn to the shard in the hope of being reunited with it; this essence calls out in whispers to those who might hear, seeking to draw potential slaves to it who it can use to retrieve the shard.

Involving the Characters

Any of the following adventure hooks are suitable for involving the characters in the adventure.

The Calling: While traveling near the strange old wall, one of the characters hears the sound of glass wind chimes that none of the others can hear. Mixed in with the chimes are whispers that speak of powerful magic, ancient lore, and power to be found. If followed, the whispers lead the character to an entrance in the wall and from there to the Glass-Spire Forest.

The Whispering Shard: An adventurer who managed to return from the Glass-Spire Forest brought back a piece of one of the glass spires as a memento. The chunk of brown glass comes into a player character's possession, and that character begins having dreams of the forest while whispers in his or her mind speak of a priceless treasure concealed there. The character gains the knowledge of how to reach the Glass-Spire Forest.

Tale of the Glass Forest: Stories of a shrine among a "glass forest" beyond the wall have existed for a long time. Recently, a pair of adventurers returned from beyond the wall with a tale of a strange forest of glass spires that shriek like giant glass chimes when the wind blows. They have no wish to return to the forest but are willing to provide the location for a price.

Treasure

As a shorter adventure, the characters should get only two parcels of treasure. This adventure grants parcels 3 and 7 from the 2nd-level list (*Dungeon Master's Guide*, page 127). One parcel comes in the form of residuum from the remains of the glass guardians equal to parcel 7's value (170 gp), which can be sold or used for rituals or item creation. Parcel 3 should be a level 4 magic item drawn from the players' wish lists. Modify the treasure as needed for your party's level.

Starting the Side Trek/Adventure

After crossing beyond the great wall, a half-day's travel brings the characters to the Glass-Spire Forest as dusk sets in.

When the characters see the forest, read:

Ahead, you see a strange sight. The late-afternoon sun glints off the tops of many tall glass spires of various earthy colors standing at different angles. The land has been warped and twisted, forming a forest of glass spires. As the wind swirls among the strange formations, a soft but high-pitched keening rises. Sharp glass shards carpet the ground, making travel through this "forest" difficult.

General Details

The forest covers a few square miles. Because of the shattered glass littering the ground, as well as the strange reflections given off by the oddly angled spires, navigating the forest to the shrine is a difficult and dangerous process. Doing so safely and without drawing the attention of nearby predators requires a skill challenge and takes several hours.

Level: 2 (XP 525)

Complexity: 3 (requires 8 successes before 3 failures)

Primary Skills: Acrobatics, Arcana, Athletics, History, Nature, Perception, Stealth

Acrobatics (DC 10): Balance on broken sections of glass, move through narrow spaces between sharp fragments, and use acrobatic maneuvers to avoid scraping against sharp shards. This skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes.

Arcana (DC 15): Extend your senses outward to notice the taint of the meteorite shard still within the glass spires of the forest, sensing the direction that this energy is emanating from (the shrine). This skill can earn a maximum of 1 success.

Athletics (DC X): Leap over piles of shards, safely climb spires to see the path, and help party members get through tight spaces in the path. This skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes.

History (DC 15): Use knowledge of the history and stories of the Glass-Spire Forest to identify the reputed location of the shrine. This skill can earn a maximum of 1 success.

Nature (DC 10): The Glass-Spire Forest has similarities to a real forest. Use nature knowledge to choose the best path and avoid dangerous places. This skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes. After the second failure, if a character has made a successful Perception check to detect pursuit, Nature can also be used to try to throw off pursuit (DC 15), which removes the glass guardian nestlings from the combat encounter. This check can be used only once and counts as 1 success.

Perception (DC 15): Find safe paths and the best route to the shrine. This check is more difficult because of the way the glass spires warp the light, as well as the fact that the spire edges appear smooth but are actually very sharp. This skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes. After the second failure, a secondary Perception check is opened (one check only) to hear the sounds of the pursuing glass guardian nestlings (DC 10). Success opens up Stealth or Nature to throw off pursuit (no success/failure to overall challenge).

Stealth (DC 15): Opens up after the second failure when a secondary Perception check is successful to notice pursuit. A character can gain 1 additional challenge success and remove the glass guardian nestlings from the combat encounter. This check can be used only once.

Secondary Skills: Dungeoneering, Heal

Dungeoneering (DC 12): Because of the alien landscape, which has some resemblance to the Underdark, this skill can be used in place of a Nature check, with a harder DC.

Heal (DC 15): Successfully pad hands and feet, or bandage minor wounds during the journey (one check, can be aided at DC 10). This check doesn't count toward the skill challenge success or failure, but if successful, it adds a +5 bonus to each character's Endurance check if the challenge is failed.

Success: If the characters earn 8 successes, they find their way to the shrine without alerting a nearby glass guardian to their presence and manage to avoid causing themselves undue injuries from brushing against the sharp shards (no Endurance check required). The dome of the shrine comes into view shortly thereafter, and the characters will enter a combat encounter with the glass guardians when they arrive.

Failure: With each failed skill check, the characters make mistakes in their journey, causing them harm and/or alerting glass guardians in the area to their location, which will create a more dangerous combat encounter when they arrive at the shrine.

First Failure: The character failing the check accidentally causes a nearby spire to shatter, sending shards flying in all directions. Each character loses 1 healing surge.

Second Failure: The character failing the check alerts a pair of glass guardian nestlings to the group's presence. The nestlings will track the characters back to the shrine and join in the combat encounter there. This failure opens up Perception to notice (hear) the guardian's pursuit, potentially allowing the use of a Stealth check or Nature check to throw the glass guardian nestlings off the trail.

Third (total) Failure: Each character must make a DC 10 Endurance check or lose 1 healing surge to injuries sustained while picking their way through the deadly glass shards. Additionally, an extra glass guardian notices the group's presence and joins the combat encounter at the shrine. The dome of the shrine will come into view shortly thereafter, and the characters will enter a combat encounter with the glass guardians when they arrive.

Encounter 1: Glass Guardian Attack

Encounter level 4 (886 XP), or

Encounter level 5 with the 2 nestlings (948 XP), or

Encounter level 5 with extra guardian if the characters failed the skill challenge (1,123 XP).

Setup

4 glass guardians (G)
6 glass guardian nestlings (H)

The glass guardians emerge from the spires and attack when the characters approach the shrine. If the party failed the skill challenge, there will be an additional glass guardian, and there may be two additional glass guardian nestlings if they weren't thrown off the party's trail.

When the characters enter the grounds near the shrine, read:

Erected in the center of a small clearing ahead of you is a shrine of opaque glass. Its smooth dome is formed from a single piece of light blue glass that caps a series of fused spires of various earthy colors. A dark archway to your left presents the only entrance, but before you can investigate further, scorpionlike creatures made from the same stuff as the spires dart into the clearing and advance on your position.

Tactics

The nestlings will climb nearby spires to reach positions where they can use spire leap. The adult glass guardians use piercing shard to fire glass shards at the group before engaging the nearest enemy with lancing claw attacks. They fight to the death, since they were bred to guard the shrine.

4 Glass Guardian (G) **Level 4 Brute**
Medium aberrant magical beast XP 175
Initiative +6 **Senses** Perception +3; low-light vision, tremorsense 4
Piercing Slivers aura 1; an enemy that ends its turn in the aura takes 2 damage.
HP 65; **Bloodied** 32; see also *death burst*.
AC 16; **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 13
Speed 6
⊕ **Lancing Claw** (standard; at-will)
+7 vs. AC; 2d8 + 5 damage.
⊕ **Piercing Shard** (standard; at-will)
Ranged 5; +8 vs. AC; 1d8 damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).
Death Burst (when the glass guardian drops to 0 hit points)
Close burst 2; +5 vs. Reflex; 2d6 damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 17 (+5) **Dex** 18 (+6) **Wis** 12 (+3)
Con 15 (+4) **Int** 4 (-1) **Cha** 8 (+1)

Glass Guardians

Glass guardians are aberrant creatures created from giant scorpions but with a carapace made from a glasslike substance. They walk on six segmented legs and have a single "arm" ending in a sharp, glassy point instead of a claw. Like scorpions, they have an overhanging tail, but instead of a stinger, adults have many glass shards loosely attached at the top that can be whipped at an enemy.

6 Glass Guardian Nestlings- (N) **Level 2 Minion Skirmisher**
Small aberrant magical beast XP 31
Initiative +6 **Senses** Perception +1; low-light vision, tremorsense 4
Piercing Slivers aura 1; an enemy that ends its turn in the aura takes 2 damage.
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion; see also *death burst*.
AC 15; **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 12
Speed 8, climb 6
⊕ **Lancing Claw** (standard; at-will)
+6 vs. AC; 4 damage.
⊕ **Spire Leap** (standard; at-will)
The glass guardian nestling must be on a surface above the target. The nestling shifts 3 squares (it can jump during this move) before the attack; +7 vs. AC; 5 damage. *Effect:* The nestling doesn't take falling damage from using this attack power.
Death Burst (when the glass guardian nestling drops to 0 hit points)
Close burst 2; +5 vs. Reflex; 4 damage.
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Skills: Stealth +9
Str 13 (+2) **Dex** 16 (+4) **Wis** 10 (+1)
Con 13 (+2) **Int** 4 (-1) **Cha** 6 (-1)

Features of the Area

Illumination: Bright. The party enters the clearing at dusk, but the spires enhance the fading light.

Entrance to the Shrine: A large glass door sits within the recessed archway. The door is closed but has a single, rectangular pane of purple glass set into its center. Striking the pane with a fragment from any of the glass spires will cause the pane to resonate with a high pitch for 20 seconds (3 rounds), and then the door will open. The door can also be forced open with a DC 18 Strength check or a DC 17 Thievery check.

Shrine: The outer shrine walls are constructed of sharp, ridged glass spires. They extend upward 15 feet to the edge of the dome, which climbs another 10 feet to its apex. Climbing the walls requires a DC 15 Athletics check; with any failure, the character takes 1d6 damage from the sharp edges in addition to falling damage. Movement on the slick domed roof requires a DC 10 Acrobatics check to avoid slipping and falling off the roof.

Spires: The freestanding spires in the area rise to a height of between 10 and 20 feet (see map). Climbing the spires requires a DC 10 Climb check; with any failure, the character takes 1d6 damage in addition to any falling damage. The nestlings can automatically climb these surfaces.

Shattered Spires (S): These areas within the clearing are difficult terrain. Any character moving through the square must make a DC 10 Acrobatics or Athletics check or take 1d6 damage from the sharp shards.

Terrain Outside the Clearing: All terrain outside the clearing and the path is difficult terrain because of the broken spires littering the area.

Treasure: Being aberrant creatures, some of the glass guardians' organs have value as residuum for rituals and item enchantment. A total of 170 gp in residuum can be collected from this group.

Encounter 2: Shard Slave of the Glass Shrine

Encounter level 5 (1,000 XP)

Setup

1 shard slave (S)

The shard slave, a remnant of Xennul trapped in the shrine, waits in the main room, hoping to dominate one or more of the characters so that it may use their body to search for the shard that was taken from Xennul. A depression in the center of the room and patches of treacherous flooring present terrain obstacles and hazards for the characters.

When the characters enter the shrine, read:

The ceiling of the shrine's dome glows with a faint blue radiance, illuminating the structure slightly. An antechamber with glass basins set on either side opens into the main chamber. There, narrow steps descend about 6 feet down into a rectangular depression in the floor with some sort of glass disc at its center. Beyond the depression, a pair of the strange glass guardians wait unmoving.

When the characters move into the main room, read:

You sense movement from a shadowed alcove beyond the motionless guardians, which appear to be glass statues. An ethereal humanoid figure floats forward, whispering in your minds of its precious shard as it reaches toward you with long, wispy tendrils. Although humanoid, its gaunt features, gaping orifices, and wormlike tongue resemble nothing familiar. Such an abomination could only have been spawned in some alien realm.

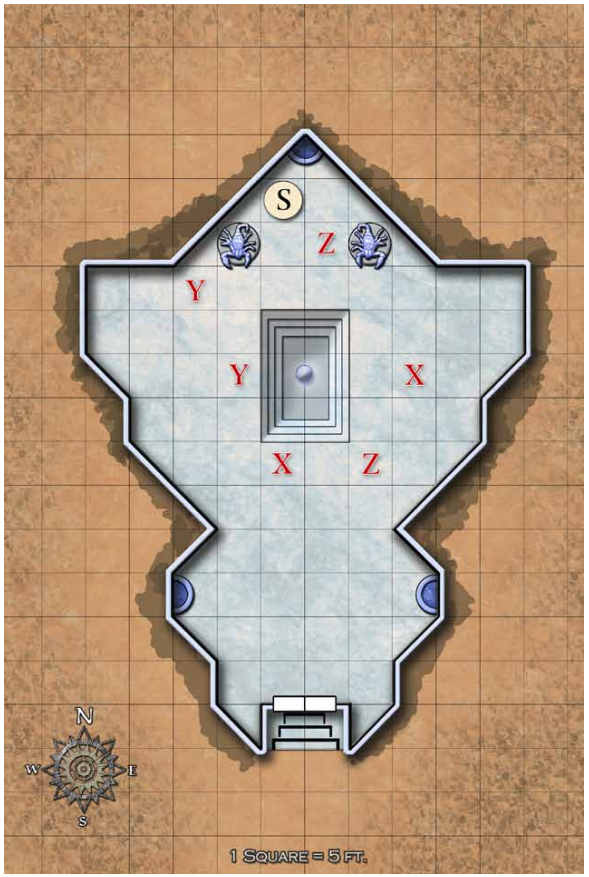
Features of the Area

Illumination: The pair of magical fonts filled with glowing water provide bright, bluish-white light out to 15 feet. Elsewhere, the last light of the day seeping through the glass walls creates dim light in the main chamber.

Magical Fonts: The power of the meteorite shard still infuses the shrine, creating the lighted water. If a character douses his or her weapon or implement in the water (a minor action), his or her next attack made before the end of his or her next turn deals radiant damage in addition to its normal damage types.

Depression: A series of four narrow steps leads to the bottom of a six-foot depression within the main chamber. Set at the bottom is a circle of thick glass with a 2-inch by 6-inch by 1-inch impression within it. This once housed the meteorite shard. Each square in the depression is difficult terrain. A character can make a DC 10 Athletics check or Acrobatics check to treat these squares as normal terrain during his or her turn while moving through these squares. On a failure, the character falls prone in the first such square entered. A DC 10 Arcana check or Religion check reveals that something of great power (the shard) once resided within the impression, and memories of it still linger throughout the shrine.

Statues: Each statue resembles a glass guardian but is simply inert glass. A statue has defenses of 4 and 3 hit points. Reducing a statue to 0 hit points causes it to explode: close burst 2; +5 vs. Reflex; 1d6 damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends). The statues provide cover.



Walls: The walls are 15 feet high and merge into the domed ceiling. They are relatively smooth, with the only holds provided by sharp protrusions, so that a DC 15 Athletics check is required to climb. On a failure, the character takes 1d6 damage in addition to falling damage.

Treasure: A third font stands at the back of the shrine. Instead of holding water, it contains a pane of purple glass. Lying on top of or against this font is the other treasure parcel; a level 4 item from the party's magic item wish list. Also, see the Scrying Font sidebar at the end of this adventure.

Treacherous Flooring: Three types of hazardous terrain within the main chamber may cause the characters difficulty. Each type fills two squares (see map) and looks similar to the surrounding flooring, making it difficult to detect. The shard slave is unaffected by this terrain.

- ✦ **Spiked Flooring** (X): Small, sharp glass spikes stick out of the floor.
- ✦ **Sticky Flooring** (Y): The floor is strangely tacky, gripping at anything that comes in contact with it.
- ✦ **Smooth Flooring** (Z): The floor is extremely smooth and slippery.

Tactics

The shard slave uses dominating tendril to try to dominate or kill one or more characters. Dominated characters hear the shard whispering in their minds that they must retrieve the shard of power for Xennul while it's attached. It will try to use call of the shard early in the fight when at least two characters are in range, and then spend an action point to use double attack on two different characters if its tendrils are unattached. If it's surrounded, it will either use shard reflection to escape or use shard burst to push away enemies and then spend its action point to make a tendril attack. The shard slave will direct any character it's dominating to attack arcane spellcasters or those who have the ability to move its dominated victims away from it. The hazardous terrain in the shrine doesn't affect the shard slave.

Treacherous Floor Level 2 Obstacle
Hazard XP 125

This section of floor is different from the rest. As you step on it, you realize that the floor isn't safe.

Hazard: Six squares in the main chamber contain one of three types of hazardous terrain: spiked, sticky, and slippery.

Perception

✦ **DC 15:** When adjacent to one of these squares, a character with a passive Perception of 15 or higher will notice the true texture of that square.

✦ **DC 15:** Any character can make an active Perception check to notice all hazardous terrain within 3 squares of him or her; DC 13 if the area is brightly lit.

Trigger

The hazard attacks whenever a character enters one of the hazard's six squares.

Attack (Spiked Flooring)
Immediate Reaction **Melee**
Target: The creature that triggered the hazard.
Attack: +6 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 1d6 damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).

Attack (Sticky Flooring)
Immediate Reaction **Melee**
Target: The creature that triggered the hazard.
Attack: +6 vs. Reflex
Hit: The target is immobilized (save ends).
Miss: The target is slowed until the end of its next turn.

Attack (Smooth Flooring)
Immediate Reaction **Melee**
Target: The creature that triggered the hazard.
Attack: +6 vs. Reflex
Hit: The target falls prone.

Countermeasures:

✦ A character who makes a successful Athletics check (DC 6 or DC 11 without a running start) can jump over a single square of hazardous flooring.

✦ An adjacent character can disable a hazardous square with a DC 15 Thievery check if that character has some sort of covering that can be placed over the square.

✦ A character can attack a hazardous square (AC 12, other defenses 10; Hp 20; resist 5 all). Destroying a hazardous square removes the hazard and changes it to difficult terrain.

What if a character is killed by the shard slave?

If the shard slave manages to kill a character, at your option, it will inhabit that character's body, pushing the character's soul into the background rather than killing him or her. At that point, the next attack that hits the shard slave (and that doesn't reduce it to 0 hit points) will seem to shatter its body and vaporize it. In actuality, it has entered and taken control of the dead character's body. If appropriate, get that character's player to go along with the ruse. Give him or her the shard slave's key motivations toward the goal of retrieving its shard. If the ruse is later discovered and the shard slave is forced out of the character through a ritual or other means, the character resumes control.

Shard Slave		**Level 4 Solo Controller**
Medium aberrant humanoid (undead)		XP 875
Initiative +6	**Senses** Perception +8; darkvision	
HP 148; **Bloodied** 74		
AC 16; **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 17		
Resist 5 necrotic; insubstantial (if the shard slave takes radiant damage, it doesn't benefit from being insubstantial during its next turn); **Vulnerable** 5 radiant (and see insubstantial)		
Saving Throws +5		
Speed 6		
Action Points 2		
⊕ **Dominating Tendril** (standard; at-will) ☒ **Charm, Psychic**		
Reach 3; +7 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 1 psychic damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 psychic damage (save ends). *First Failed Save:* The target instead takes ongoing 5 psychic damage and is dominated (save ends both). The tendril remains attached until the target saves.		
⊕ **Double Attack** (standard; encounter)		
The shard slave makes two *dominating tendril* attacks.		
✧ **Call of the Shard** (standard; recharge ⚅) ✦ **Charm, Psychic**		
Close burst 5; +7 vs. Will; 1d10 + 3 psychic damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to saving throws (save ends).		
✧ **Shard Burst** (standard; encounter) ✦ **Force**		
Close burst 2; targets enemies; +7 vs. Fortitude; 2d8 + 3 force damage, and the target is pushed 3 squares.		
Shard Reflection (immediate reaction, when the shard slave takes damage; encounter)		
The shard slave shifts 6 squares.		
Alignment Evil	**Languages** telepathy 10	
Str 4 (-1)	**Dex** 19 (+6)	**Wis** 12 (+3)
Con 13 (+3)	**Int** 14 (+4)	**Cha** 8 (+1)

Scrying Font

Use of the scrying font is at the DM's discretion. It is an excellent springboard to further adventures, but if you don't want to create those adventures or have nothing prepared for the clues to lead to, then the font can simply be dead or inoperable.

If you choose to utilize the font of purple glass in the back alcove, then it still holds some power. Any character trained in Arcana or Religion who comes within 10 feet of the font will sense the power held within it. With investigation, a DC 10 Arcana check or DC 12 Religion check will reveal that the font will operate as a limited scrying device. Determining its operation requires another check: DC 15 Arcana, DC 17 Religion, or DC 15 Thievery (fooling about with it). Success indicates that a character must make contact with the purple stone and channel energy into it (a healing surge). Doing so reveals either the general location of the shard slave's meteorite shard (this can lead to further adventures devised by the DM) or a gigantic fortress at the head of a valley (also with details to be supplied by the DM).

About the Author

Cal Moore joined Wizards of the Coast in 2000 as an editor for the *Showdown* line of sports TCGs. He has contributed to a wide range of trading card games, miniatures games, and Avalon Hill games while at Wizards. In 2009, he joined the RPG side of the business and hasn't looked back. Cal has been part of an ongoing Thursday night game with the same core players, both as DM and player, since he joined the company.

FORGOTTEN REALMS®

Explore Ikemmu: The Gloaming City

By Matt James

illustration by Evan Shipard & John Stanko
cartography by Sean MacDonald

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Wispy strands of gray matter float endlessly in the colorless expanse that is the Shadowfell. In a city that is known for being a source of exotic trade, Ikemmu is a hardy and militant enclave. Meanwhile, deeply removed from the invigorating sun that exists on the surface, the shadowy sister-haven of Ikemmu resides within the caliginous and ominous caverns of the Underdark. It, too, serves as a massive hub of trade and commerce for the two planes and is the source of Ikemmu's recent emergence as one of the more powerful of the shadow enclaves. Mystical spires tower over the city and offer insight into its ancient creators. What dangers lurk just outside the vertical expanses of Ikemmu is largely unknown, but one truth cannot be denied—this shadar-kai city serves as bastion of power in both the Underdark and the Shadowfell.

The Legend of Sphur Upra

Buried deep beneath the lands of Aglarond on the surface world, the edge of the Ramparts of Night is now home to a thriving and vibrant city that straddles two planes of existence on the rim of a reflective canyon. As if mirrored by some long-forgotten power, the city of Ikemmu is a marvel amongst realities, for it exists simultaneously between the Underdark and the Shadowfell.

Ikemmu was originally known as the gloaming city of Sphur Upra. It now hosts the largest population of shadar-kai in all the Realms. Droves of shadar-kai were forced to seek refuge in the city by growing threats within their domain. Before the shadar-kai, however, the city was built and formerly occupied by creatures known as cloakers, which accounts for its unique design; it is built primarily vertically instead of horizontally as most cities are constructed. The ability of shadar-kai to use the shadows as a means of transportation has made this ancient city a natural choice for their defense against traditional enemies.

Little is known about the origins of the city nor the original inhabitants, but much speculation points to the Spellplague as the catalyst for the massive exodus. No sage or loremaster has been able to determine with any certainty who these mysterious cloakers were or where they disappeared to. Very little was left behind by this culture other than Sphur Upra and only a few key structures remain that tell their tale.

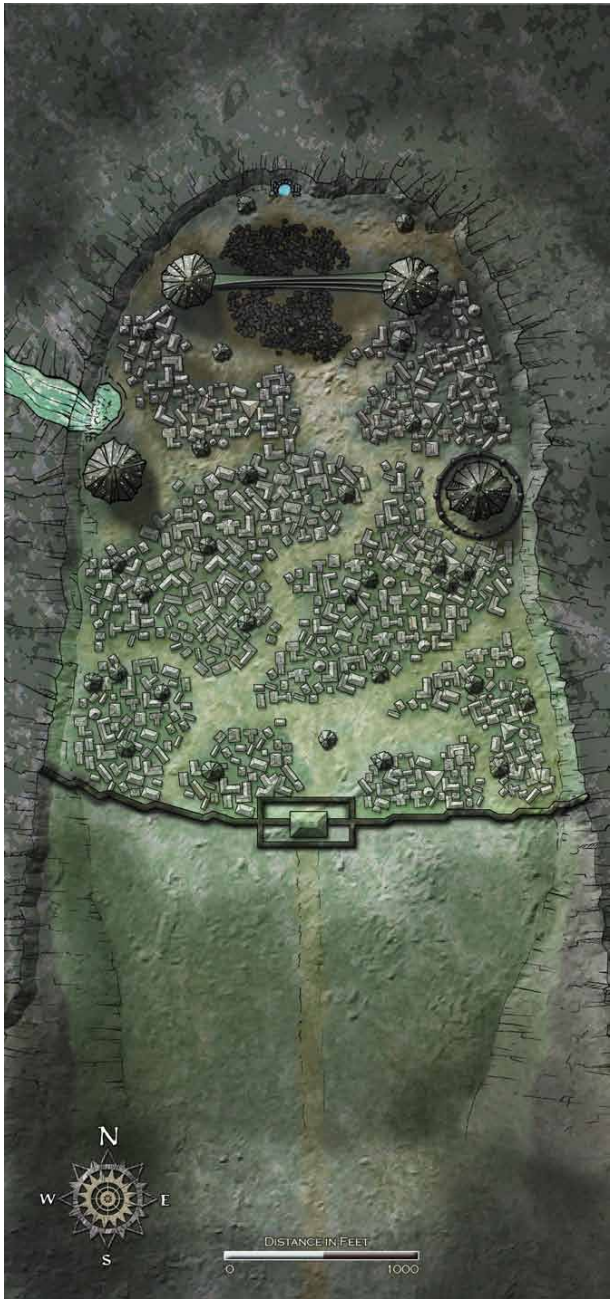
Mysterious carvings have been located in recent years that depict winged humanoids living side-by-side with cloakers. In these carvings, mysterious doorlike arches appear in the city's open markets, graven with ritual symbols. This has given rise to a competing hypothesis that perhaps these creatures rather than the cloakers were the city's builders, but few give credence to the idea.

Now, as more travelers come and go through the city's obsidian gates, the truth is more elusive than ever. Who were the city's winged inhabitants? Why, with such power, would they leave? Did the Spellplague truly inflict such fear and doubt?

Ikemmu's Story

Many races come to Ikemmu to live and trade and work. Some occupy vital domestic niches that the shadar-kai, by virtue of their volatile natures, are unable to fulfill. Common shopkeepers, domestic household staff, and other nonmilitary functions are often filled by the humans, Dark Ones, and other races that have made the city their home. Shadar-kai offer everything in trade that they can acquire, including finely crafted weapons, goods from the Underdark, and goods raided from the Drow, Thayans, and the Hordelands. They also raid the Shadowfell, capturing and training shadow beasts to sell or use in the military.

Trade and religion are important components of Ikemmu. Worship of the warrior god Tempus is prevalent. The shadar-kai need for stimulation is satisfied by constant training and preparation for raids and battles, but at the same time the shadar-kai are comrades in battle and in defense of their city. Denizens of Ikemmu rise in prominence by how well they serve and defend their city, not by how they conquer rivals. The other races that live and trade in Ikemmu are accepted by the shadar-kai as a means of strengthening the economy, but they are generally considered second class citizens. Rarely, if at all, would you see such external races participating in any sort of battle, unless they have made a name for themselves through merit or decree.



Ikemmu of the Shadowdark

Regional Background: Ikemmu

You hail from the mighty shadar-kai city of Ikemmu. With its proximity to the multiple planes, you have learned to adapt to hostile environments.

You gain a +2 bonus to Arcana and Dungeoneering checks in addition to a +2 bonus to skill checks when using any travel ritual.

Geography

Ikemmu is a unique place in the Faerünian multiverse, as it consists of two parts occupying separate planes of existence. One is in the Underdark and the other in the Shadowfell. This unique situation affords Ikemmu opportunities in trade that are not found anywhere else. Shadar-kai merchants traverse the ancient gate that separates the two parts of the city with rare and unique wares from both sides. Inhabitants of the Shadowfell are just as eager to trade for items of the Underdark as those of the Underdark who seek rare shadow items in return.

No formal roads exist in Ikemmu because of its vertical design, but locals and visitors either have little trouble getting from one point to another—or they simply can't.

Old Sphur Upra

Much of Ikemmu is constructed out of ancient obsidian stone that was harvested from the deepest recesses of the Underdark. As Creation fights against the natural forces of the world, this unformed stone becomes particularly absorbent to ritual magic, thus creating a natural defense against more potent adversaries.

Ikemmu is a very rare and ancient city, likely not the result of shadar-kai work and dedication. The previous inhabitants were adept at erecting magnificent structures that both defy logic and captivate onlookers. The amount of detail that went into these early structures is amazing to anyone knowledgeable on such topics. Many of the dwellings are in near ruin and bear indelible scars from a fire that must have swept through the city in the distant past. Scholars speculate that it may have been the same blue fire that nearly destroyed most of the known world.

Newer construction has expanded the city of Ikemmu to accommodate the influx of residents in recent decades. These buildings are of standard design for the Underdark and provide housing for the vast majority of enclave soldiers.

Ikemmu

Ikemmu is an exciting and exotic city found deep within the Underdark. With a direct connection to the Shadowfell, Ikemmu is an important trading post between these unique locations.

Population (8,000): another 4,000 live in the surrounding areas and contribute to the commerce and livelihood of the shadar-kai enclave. The vast majority of the population is shadar-kai refugees who long ago fled from the ravages of the Spellplague to find a more peaceful life. Small populations of other races have taken up permanent residence in Ikemmu and are rarely seen other than in fleeting moments during busier hours of the day. Few deva are ever seen within Ikemmu as social discrimination keeps them from feeling comfortable or welcome.

Government: Ikemmu is ruled by a plutocracy consisting of a close-knit syndicate of extremely discreet merchants whose identities are known by few. Their discretion affords them the unique opportunity to trade with many of the black-market dealers of Faerûn, trafficking goods between the Underdark and Shadowfell. The trade is dangerous but also lucrative—something no enterprising person could easily forsake.

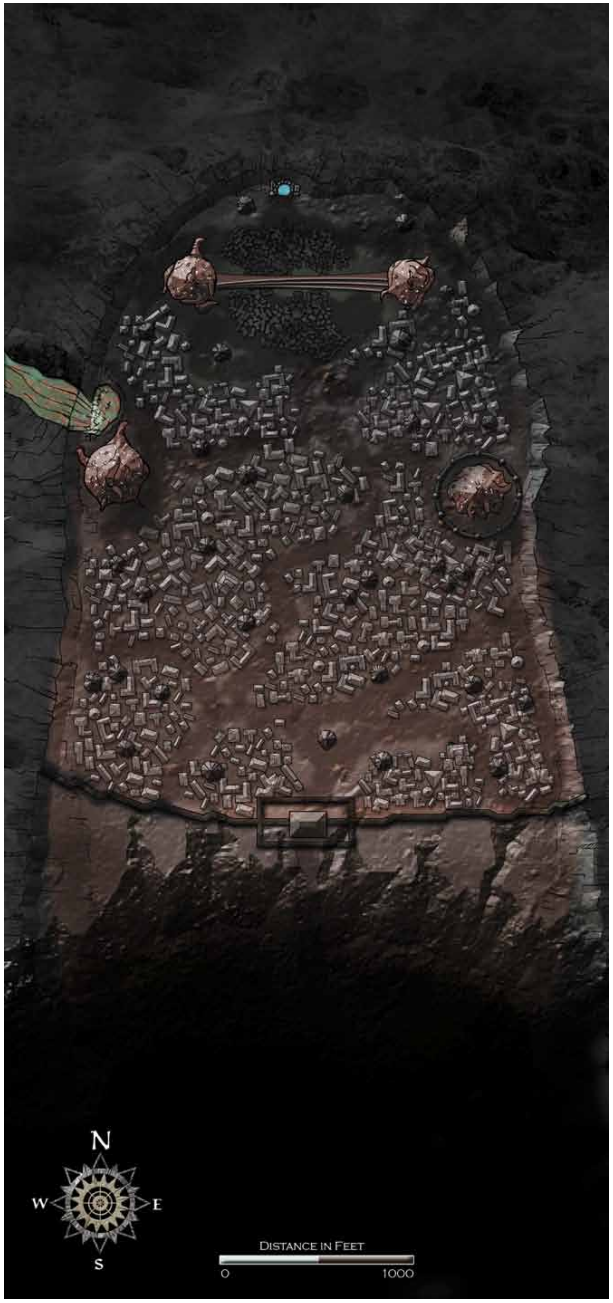
Defense: Much of Ikemmu's populace is highly disciplined and trained soldiers who are ready to defend their city with fervor, grace, and determination.

Inns: Blight-Keeper's Inn, The Shallows, the Bordengath, and Iak's Auberge. On the Shadowfell side, the only place to stay is called the Rusted Chain.

Taverns: Chaos, Leil's Cup, The Wayfarer's Alehouse, and the Leaning Sword. On the Shadowfell side, Dalegot's End, Myriad's Horn, and the Jesting Joker.

Supplies: The Vilhon Expedition Company, Korky's Cupboard, and Mordak Outfitters. On the Shadowfell side, 'Oolio's adventuring' is the only supply shop.

Temples: Shrines to the god of war, Tempus, are peppered throughout Ikemmu along with dedicated shines to Shar. There are secret enclaves of Ghaunadaur, but for obvious reasons they are not too publically active. Most other religions can be found if one searches hard enough but they do not play a large enough role in the city to be a centerpiece of daily life.



Ikemmu of the Underdark

The Four Towers

Of the many magnificent and awe-inspiring structures in Ikemmu, four towers attract the attention of every visitor. While not much is known of their original purposes, it is readily apparent that they contain arcane empowerment that is somehow fused with divine power. Loremasters speculate that it was what "the ancients" used to vacate the city when the Spellplague began its cleansing.

Facing them, the towers from left to right are *Makthar*, which contains the city's principle temple to Tempus; *Pyton*, which serves as one of Ikemmu's trade centers; *Hevalor*, a mercantile center focused primarily on exotic goods and trade; and finally *Athanon*, where the warriors of Ikemmu and its ruler dwell.

Of particular note, setting them apart from the other towers, Makthar is crowned by stone spikes with lightning that dances between each. During each hour of the "day," magical bells are rung that can be heard all across the city and beyond and a beautiful waterfall cascades down the cliff wall. Tower Athanon is fenced and has carvings of Tempus's sword and winged humanoids etched all around it. A single, ominous eye is carved at the top of the tower.

Three bridges connect Pyton and Hevalor at various heights but are camouflaged against the cliff wall. Roughly-carved stone juts up from the bridges in a curved, tusklike shape. There are no such connections between Makthar and Athanon.

Prison Rathmore

Another location of note is a cave complex between Pyton and Helavor towers. This cave has the distinct honor of serving as the prison for Ikemmu, and it is an effective deterrent to would-be criminals. The horrors that lie within are not merely that of caged cells-beasts of the caves roam freely within.

To expedite trials and to prevent crowding of the prison, guards often let the prisoners loose with the promise of freedom should they escape intact. Many try but few achieve such a goal. When one is successful, the shadar-kai guards are so impressed with their skill, bravery, and ability to survive that they honor their agreement to let them go. This, of course, also leads to many deaths among the most desperate prisoners, but the guards have no qualms over that.

11: Escape from Prison Rathmore

Encounter Level 2 (625 XP)

Dead Man Walking . . .

Dark, dank, murky caves have been transformed into a labyrinth of seemingly endless prison cells. Guards move about only in groups of four or more, and the horrific sounds of unknown horrors echo down each dark corridor. As you sit, you cannot help but feel utterly alone. You must do something to get out alive!

Escape from Prison Rathmore

Desperate to get out of Rathmore Prison, you use all resources at your disposal to arrange your escape. Whether sweet-talking the guard, or find resourceful ways of escaping, you know you will not survive long without a plan.

Level: 2 (XP 625)

Complexity: 3 (requires 8 successes before 3 failures)

Primary Skills: Acrobatics, Perception, Insight, Stealth, Thievery.

Acrobatics (DC 15): You contort your body enough to fit between the bars of a locked gate. This skill can earn a maximum of 1 success per character.

Perception or Insight (DC 10): The character figures out the timing of the guard patrols in order to slip past when they aren't nearby. Each of these skills can earn a maximum of 1 success.

Stealth (DC 10): The characters elude capture and monsters by sticking to the least-traveled areas of the catacomb and moving as quietly as possible. All Stealth checks must be group checks, and the characters must attempt at least one group Stealth check. This skill can earn any number of successes.

Thievery (DC 15): The character opens a rusted, forgotten lock with an improvised pick. This skill can earn a maximum of 1 success.

Success: The party navigates out of Prison Rathmore and wins its freedom.

Failure: The characters become lost. They can either surrender themselves to guards and be returned to the prison, or engage in a fight against Underdark monsters at their level +2 and then try the skill challenge again.

General Nadar

This elite soldier of Ikemmu is a legend amongst the shadar-kai. Known for his brutal command of Ikemmuan forces, General Nadar is both feared and revered by the armies he commands. He is a master tactician who fully understands the intricacies of strategic warfare.

General Nadar does not take anything for granted. He believes that the end justifies the means, so he will do whatever is required to secure victory.

> General Nadar is a great antagonist to introduce to your characters for a long-term plot. Adjust his level accordingly as characters rise in levels to keep him a suitable challenge.

He has been known to be less than honorable on the field of battle.

General Nadar	**Level 15 Elite Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid (shadar-kai, leader)	XP 2,400
Initiative +13	**Senses** Perception +9
HP 290; **Bloodied** 145	
AC 30; **Fortitude** 28, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 27	
Saving Throws +2	
Speed 6	
Action Points 1	
⊕ **Spiked Chain** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Martial**	
Reach 2; +22 vs. AC; 2d10 + 8 damage, and the target is marked until the start of Nadar's next turn.	
⸸ **Double Attack** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Melee**	
Nadar makes two *spiked chain* attacks.	
⸸ **Follow-up Attack** (minor 1/round; at-will) ✦ **Martial**	
+20 vs. Reflex; 1d6 + 6 damage, and the target is knocked prone.	
Shadow Jaunt (move; encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**	
Nadar teleports 3 squares and becomes insubstantial until the start of his next turn.	
Astral Rally (standard; encounter) ✦ **Healing, Teleportation**	
Close burst 5; all allies in the burst regain 10 hit points, can teleport 5 squares, and make a melee basic attack after teleporting.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** Common, Elven
Str 26 (+15)	**Dex** 19 (+11) **Wis** 15 (+9)
Con 17 (+10)	**Int** 14 (+9) **Cha** 18 (+11)
Equipment leather armor, spiked chain	

Tactics

General Nadar will use all resources at his disposal to eradicate his opposition. Rarely does he take prisoners unless specifically directed by Ikemmu's ruling family, and he has been known to order the slaughter of surrendering enemies. He will often send in weaker forces, sparing his more experienced units, until an escalation of force is required.

Encounter Group

Though Nadar does travel alone from time to time, he usually has an entourage of family and supporters.

Level 15 Encounter (XP 6,400)

Nadar (level 15 elite skirmisher)
1 shadar-kai painbearer (level 15 skirmisher; *MM2*)
4 shadar-kai warriors (level 8 soldier; *MM*)

Hook: Introducing General Nadar

General Nadar takes pleasure in doing the bidding of the ruling family. He is well known for triggering conflicts that force Ikemmu to call on his services. He is not afraid of any fight. Examples of how he could encounter the characters include:

- The heroes are ambushed by a patrol of General Nadar's forces. This was arranged on Nadar's orders for reasons the characters gan only guess at.
- General Nadar has the characters arrested for a crime they did not commit and thrown into Rathmore prison, purely to test their mettle. If they get out of the prison, he challenges them personally, purely to test *his* mettle.

About the Author

Matt James is a disabled combat veteran, having been wounded in action while serving in Iraq during 2005. When not freelance writing for Dungeons & Dragons®, Matt is chained to his desk working endlessly on developing his D&D website; Loremaster (http://www.loremaster.org).
You can also follow Matt's gaming insights at www.twitter.com/matt_james_fr

EBERRON

Creature Incarnations: Living Spells

By Peter Lee

illustrations by Michael Franchina and David Rapoza

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The Essence of Magic in Monster Form

Living spells are deadly horrors that haunt the Mournlands, the cursed remains of the great nation of Cyre. These monstrosities at first appear to be lingering conjurations, but they have no external guidance—these spells have a life of their own.

Living spells are not a natural form of life. They have no need for self-preservation, and communicating with these creatures is nearly impossible. They have no earthly needs: They don't eat, sleep, or reproduce. When encountered, living spells immediately attack. Just like the destructive nature of an attack spell, a living spell is simply fulfilling the direction provided by its arcane instinct.

General Living Spell Lore

Arcana or Dungeoneering DC 16: A living spell is a magical effect that has been transformed into a creature with a life of its own. They are drawn to sites saturated with arcane energies.

Arcana or Dungeoneering DC 21: The arcane formulas that describe a spell have one fundamental

object undefined—the target. This omission is felt by a living spell, and it fills this hole whenever it detects a suitable living being.

Living Cloud of Daggers

As a living embodiment of one of the simplest spells in the wizard's arsenal, the living cloud of daggers is a common sight in the Mournlands. It hovers like a swarm of insects, harassing nearby creatures with its mystical blades of force.

Living Cloud of Daggers **Level 10 Minion Brute**
Medium aberrant beast (blind) XP 125
Initiative +9 **Senses** Perception +7; blindsight
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
AC 22; **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 20
Speed fly 8 (hover)
⊕ **Slicing Daggers** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Force**
+11 vs. Reflex; 8 force damage.
⸸ **Envelop** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Force**
+11 vs. Reflex; 8 force damage. *Effect:* The living cloud of daggers enters a square in the target's space and the target takes ongoing 5 force damage (until the target no longer shares a space with the cloud). Any attack by a creature other than the target that hits the living cloud of daggers also hits the enveloped creature.
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 17 (+8) **Dex** 18 (+9) **Wis** 15 (+7)
Con 20 (+10) **Int** 3 (+1) **Cha** 9 (+4)

Living Cloud of Daggers Tactics

A living cloud of daggers slowly stalks its foe before racing in to *envelop* it without an immediate counterattack. Once in combat, it persistently harries nearby opponents, using slicing daggers only for opportunity attacks or when it has *enveloped* a creature. When possible, the living cloud of daggers focuses on arcane foes, such as wizards, warlocks, and sorcerers.

Living Cloud of Daggers Lore

Arcana or Dungeoneering DC 16: This creature is a living spell spawned from a wizard's *cloud of daggers*. The arcane force that animates a living cloud of daggers is dispersed easily, causing the force daggers to evaporate instantaneously. Some sages believe that the clouds have the ability to reform after some time, but that this time ranges from hours to months depending on the amount of ambient magical energy.

Living Flaming Sphere

The living flaming sphere is similar in appearance to the famous conjuration, except that no wizard lays claim to its creation and no arcane energy directs it. This creature is wild and chaotic; it never stays in one spot for long and it revels in fiery destruction.

This creature's immolating nature makes it a dangerous threat when encountered in the wild. The blazing skin causes nearby plants to wither and blacken before ultimately bursting into flame. An experienced tracker can follow the trail of ash this creature leaves easily, but the destination of the trail is dangerous in either case. One path leads to the beast itself, and the other path leads to its origin: the glass plateau deep in the Mournlands.

Living Flaming Sphere **Level 10 Elite Skirmisher**
Medium aberrant beast (blind, ooze) XP 1,000
Initiative +11 **Senses** Perception +7; blindsight
Blazing Husk aura 1; any enemy that starts its turn within the aura takes 10 fire damage.
HP 220; **Bloodied** 110
AC 24; **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 20
Resist 10 fire; **Vulnerable** cold (a living flaming sphere that takes cold damage deals half damage with *blazing husk* until the end of its next turn)
Saving Throws +2
Speed fly 6 (hover; altitude limit 1)
Action Points 1
⊕ **Slam** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire**
+13 vs. Reflex; 3d6 + 8 fire damage.
⸸ **Immolating Crash** (standard; usable only when charging, recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Fire**
+13 vs. Reflex; 1d6 + 4 fire damage, and ongoing 10 fire damage (save ends). The sphere pushes the target 2 squares and knocks it prone. *Effect*: The living flaming sphere can shift 2 squares.
⸸ **Rolling Strike** (move; at-will) ✦ **Fire**
The living flaming sphere moves 6 squares and makes one attack at any point during the movement; +13 vs. Reflex; 3d6 + 8 fire damage, and the target falls prone. A living flaming sphere doesn't provoke opportunity attacks from the target when moving away from it.
Spinning Escape (immediate reaction, when an enemy hits this creature with an attack; at-will)
The living flaming sphere shifts 1 square.
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 18 (+9) **Dex** 19 (+9) **Wis** 15 (+7)
Con 22 (+11) **Int** 4 (+2) **Cha** 9 (+4)

Living Flaming Sphere Tactics

An inferno rages at the heart of this magical terror. The living flaming sphere caroms across the ground, ricocheting off nearby creatures and terrain. It uses *rolling strike* to maneuver into a devastating *immolating crash* attack when possible. When hit, it uses *spinning escape* to position itself next to an enemy that has not yet been subjected to *blazing husk*.

Living Flaming Sphere Lore

Arcana or Dungeoneering DC 16: The living flaming sphere is encountered frequently in the Mournlands since it was a common sight in the last war. Anyone familiar with how a trained war wizard utilizes a *flaming sphere* notices a living version is undirected—it is a rampaging and relentless force of destructive fury. Unlike the wizard's spell, a living flaming sphere can be damaged.

Corrosion Web

Most living spells are the animated form of a single spell, but occasionally multiple spells interact to form a hybrid creature. The corrosion web is an example of a living spell that combines two common arcane spells: the wizard's *web* and the sorcerer's *acid orb*. Such combinations transform each spell in unique ways; for the corrosion web, the silk filaments forming the mass of the creature are covered with a caustic slime. Like a fisher throwing a net, the corrosion web ensnares foes with thin layers of its ropy body.

Corrosion Web Tactics

The corrosion web focuses on a single foe at a time by pulling it with a *towing tendril*. Once it successfully uses *engulf* against an enemy, it keeps would-be rescuers away with repeated *ensnaring web* attacks. When fighting with other living spells, the corrosion web makes frequent use of *ensnaring web* to immobilize opponents.

Corrosion Web Lore

Arcana or Dungeoneering DC 16: A corrosion web is derived from the effects of two spells frequently used in combination: a wizard's magical *web* slows down enemies just enough to be finished off by a sorcerer's *acid orb*. This hybrid spell looks like the collapsed remains of a spider web, but thick caustic goo that dissolves skin and bone covers it.

Corrosion Web **Level 11 Controller**
Large aberrant beast (blind, ooze) XP 600

Initiative +7 **Senses** Perception +7; blindsight
HP 114; **Bloodied** 57
AC 25; **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 22
Resist 10 acid; **Vulnerable** 10 fire
Speed 6

Slam (standard; at-will) ✦ **Acid**
+15 vs. Fortitude; 2d8 + 5 acid damage, and ongoing 5 acid damage (save ends).

Engulf (standard; usable only when no creatures are engulfed; at-will) ✦ **Acid**
Targets one Medium or smaller creature; +15 vs. Reflex (automatically hits an immobilized creature); the corrosion web pulls the target into its space, and the target is grabbed. Until the grab ends, the target is dazed and takes ongoing 10 acid damage. When the grab ends, the target shifts to a square of its choosing adjacent to the corrosion web. When the corrosion web moves, it pulls any engulfed creatures with it, and it does not provoke opportunity attacks from engulfed creatures.

Towing Tendril (standard; at-will) ✦ **Acid**
Ranged 5; +15 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 9 acid damage, and the corrosion web pulls the target 3 squares.

Ensnaring Web (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Acid, Zone**
Area burst 1 within 10; +15 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 5 acid damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 acid damage and is immobilized (save ends both). *Effect:* The burst creates a zone of webs that lasts until the end of the corrosion web's next turn. The zone is difficult terrain for the corrosion web's enemies.

Combustible
If the corrosion web takes fire damage while a creature is engulfed, the engulfed creature takes 10 fire damage.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –

Str 14 (+7)	**Dex** 15 (+7)	**Wis** 15 (+7)
Con 18 (+9)	**Int** 4 (+2)	**Cha** 7 (+3)

Living Spells in Your Campaign

Living spells were originally designed for the Eberron® setting, but it's easy to use these creatures in your own campaign. Any area infused with magic is a natural spawning ground, such as areas devastated by the Spellplague in the Forgotten Realms® setting. Also, these creatures can be a welcome addition in any adventure that includes a source of arcane power. For example, when a human diabolist (*Monster Manual*® 2, page 114) is defeated by the characters, the diabolist's last spell is interrupted in a violent explosion that spawns a chillspark. Another idea features a circle of power-hungry wizards that hopes to perform a ritual to enhance their magic. Ritual experimentation is dangerous, and several failed experiments have resulted in the creation of living spells. Although some living spells are captured and used as guardians for the wizards' laboratory, the more uncontrollable experiments have escaped to threaten the local populace.

Withering Grasp

The ebon tentacles and enfeebling powers of this living spell reveal its origins as the combination of *Evard's black tentacles* and *ray of enfeeblement*. The dreaded composite sucks the life out of those it envelops, weakening them to a point where they cannot escape.

Withering Grasp **Level 15 Soldier**
Large aberrant beast (blind, ooze) XP 1,200
Initiative +12 **Senses** Perception +10; blindsight
Tentacle Web aura 2; enemies treat squares within the aura as difficult terrain.
HP 148; **Bloodied** 74
AC 31; **Fortitude** 29, **Reflex** 26, **Will** 26
Resist 10 fire, 10 necrotic
Speed 6, climb 6 (spider climb)

Grasping Tentacle (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
Reach 2; +20 vs. Reflex; 4d8 + 5 necrotic damage, and the withering grasp pulls the target adjacent to it and marks it until the end of the grasp's next turn.

Engulf (standard; usable only when no creatures are engulfed; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
Targets one Medium or smaller creature; +20 vs. Reflex (automatically hits an immobilized creature); the grasp pulls the target into its space, and the target is grabbed. Until the grab ends, the target is dazed and takes ongoing 10 necrotic damage. When the grab ends, the target shifts to a square of its choosing adjacent to the withering grasp. When the grasp moves, it pulls any engulfed creatures with it, and it does not provoke opportunity attacks from engulfed creatures.

Lashing Tentacles (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
Close burst 2; +20 vs. Reflex; 3d10 + 8 necrotic damage, and the grasp pulls the target 1 square to an adjacent square and marks it until the end of the grasp's next turn.

Ebon Clutch
Enemies marked by the grasp are also immobilized as long as they are adjacent to the creature.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Skills Athletics +18, Stealth +15
Str 23 (+13) **Dex** 17 (+10) **Wis** 17 (+10)
Con 20 (+12) **Int** 4 (+4) **Cha** 9 (+6)

Withering Grasp Tactics

The withering grasp skulks in the shadows just out of sight until it can move out and trap a foe in a *grasping tentacle*. It pulls nearby targets with *lashing tentacles*, then it follows that up by using *engulf* against an unfortunate soul at the earliest opportunity.

Withering Grasp Lore

Arcana or Dungeoneering DC 18: This creature is often confused as a black pudding, but a closer examination reveals this tentacled monstrosity to be a living spell. The withering grasp combines *Evard's black tentacles* and *ray of enfeeblement*.

Frostclutch

Most living spells are chaotic blobs of bubbling magic, but a living spell of a structured conjuration resembles the original form. In the case of the frostclutch, the oversized hands of force from Bigby's arsenal fly through the air, grabbing and trapping creatures in a prison of ice.

Frostclutch **Level 18 Controller**
Medium aberrant beast (blind, ooze) XP 2,000
Initiative +14 **Senses** Perception +14; blindsight
HP 170; **Bloodied** 85
AC 32; **Fortitude** 31, **Reflex** 30, **Will** 30
Resist 10 cold
Speed fly 6 (hover)

Chilling Touch (standard; at-will) ✦ **Cold**
+22 vs. Fortitude (automatically hits a target grabbed by the frostclutch); 2d8 + 8 cold damage.

Frozen Grasp (standard; usable only while the frostclutch does not have a creature grabbed; at-will) ✦ **Cold**
+22 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 8 cold damage, and the target is grabbed.

Entomb (standard; recharge ⚅) ✦ **Cold**
Targets a creature grabbed by the frostclutch; +22 vs. Fortitude; 2d8 + 8 cold damage, the grab ends, and the target is entombed in ice (save ends). While entombed, the target takes ongoing 10 cold damage and is stunned. No creature has line of effect to the target. *Miss:* Half damage, the grab ends, and the target is entombed until the end of the frostclutch's next turn.

Drag (move; usable only while the frostclutch has a creature grabbed; at-will)
Targets a creature grabbed by the frostclutch; +22 vs. Fortitude; the frostclutch shifts 3 squares and pulls the grabbed target with it.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 22 (+15) **Dex** 20 (+14) **Wis** 20 (+14)
Con 18 (+13) **Int** 5 (+6) **Cha** 11 (+9)

Creating Your Own Living Spells

Although 3rd Edition introduced the living spell as a template, I found results in a bunch of monsters that ultimately play in the same way—a creature has only so many ways to engulf a hero and deal damage. I do have a couple of guidelines that I followed when writing this article. Of course, these are just guidelines. Whatever makes your game the most fun should be the direction you choose.

Strength of Spell Indicates Level of Monster
Running into a living meteor swarm should be much scarier than a simple living fireball. The Mournland in Eberron was designed to be a paragon level location, so a range for living spell levels between 10 and 25 made the most sense. For all the monsters in this article, I used a simple formula:

Monster Level = (Spell Attack Level/2) + 10.

For living spells that were combinations of powers, I used the average of the two spells.

Power Type Indicates Monster Secondary Role
Similar to a power's level, a power's type should also indicate the strength of a spell. A living cloud of daggers should not be as imposing as living fireball or living sleep. Your characters should cut through at-will living spells, so these living spells should be minions. Encounter powers end up as standard monsters, and daily powers make good elites. In the case where multiple types of powers make up a living spell, choose a standard monster.

– Peter Lee

Frostclutch Tactics

A frostclutch quickly flies into combat and uses *frozen grasp* against the closest foe. It uses *drag* to move that foe away from any potential assistance and either freezes it with its *chilling touch* or uses *entomb* to put the foe into a block of ice.

Frostclutch Lore

Arcana or Dungeoneering DC 20: The frostclutch is the living embodiment of *Bigby's grasping hands* and *ice tomb*. The actual hand is as varied as the conjuration that somehow became sentient: the last spell of a dragonborn wizard looks like an oversized version of his right hand, and a conjuration of a follower of Vecna is a symbolic 5-foot-tall skeletal claw.

Chillspark

Although not as common, some living spells appear from other arcane sources than wizard spells. The spells of a sorcerer are the most common nonwizard spells to gain sentience. The chillspark is the living combination of two sorcerer spells: *leaping lightning* and *breath of winter*.

Chillspark **Level 20 Skirmisher**
Large aberrant beast (blind, ooze) XP 2,800
Initiative +19 **Senses** Perception +15; blindsight
HP 132; **Bloodied** 66
AC 32; **Fortitude** 32, **Reflex** 33, **Will** 31
Resist 15 cold, 15 lightning, insubstantial
Speed fly 8 (hover), teleport 6

Slam (standard; at-will) ✦ **Cold**
+23 vs. Fortitude; 4d8 + 10 cold damage, and the target is slowed until the end of the chillspark's next turn.

Lightning Strike (standard; at-will) ✦ **Lightning**
Ranged 5; +23 vs. Reflex; 4d10 + 6 lightning damage.

Engulf (standard; usable only when no creatures are engulfed; at-will) ✦ **Lightning**
Targets one Medium or smaller creature; +23 vs. Reflex (automatically hits an immobilized creature); the chillspark pulls the target into its space, and the target is grabbed. Until the grab ends, the target is dazed and takes ongoing 15 lightning damage. When the grab ends, the target shifts to a square of its choosing adjacent to the chillspark. When the chillspark moves without teleporting, it pulls any engulfed creatures with it, and it does not provoke opportunity attacks from engulfed creatures.

Lightning Leap (standard; recharge ⚅) ✦ **Lightning, Teleportation**
Close burst 1; +23 vs. Reflex; 4d6 + 14 lightning damage. After the attack, the chillspark teleports 6 squares and then makes a secondary attack against all creatures adjacent to it that were not targeted by the first attack. *Secondary Attack:* +23 vs. Reflex; 4d6 + 14 lightning damage.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 23 (+16) **Dex** 25 (+17) **Wis** 20 (+15)
Con 20 (+15) **Int** 5 (+7) **Cha** 12 (+11)

Chillspark Tactics

The chillspark constantly leaps from target to target, causing as much chaos as it can. When possible, it teleports into a space to get the most effect out of *lightning leap*, especially at times when it can attack three or four targets. Otherwise, it alternates between using *engulf* against foes and lashing out with *lightning strike*.

Chillspark Lore

Arcana or Dungeoneering DC 22: Not all living spells are drawn from the spells of a wizard. The chillspark is the living form of the sorcerer's *breath of winter* and *leaping lightning*. This extremely mobile creature is nearly impossible to contain, since it frequently transforms into a bolt of lightning to reincorporate a short distance away.

Encounter Groups

The destructive nature of living spells means they don't commonly associate with other creatures, but exceptions have been seen. Living spells ignore the ubiquitous undead spawned from the warriors slain on the Day of Mourning and elementals are found with living spells due to their similarities. In rare circumstances, powerful wizards can control living spells.

Level 10 Encounter (XP 2,575)
- 3 living cloud of daggers (level 10 minion brute)
- 1 living flaming sphere (level 10 elite skirmisher)
- 2 mourners (level 11 controller; *Eberron® Campaign Guide*, page 94)

Level 15 Encounter (XP 6,200)
- 2 earth archon seismic strikers (level 16 soldier; *Monster Manual 2*, page 14)
- 1 stormstone fury (level 14 artillery; *Monster Manual 2*, page 101)
- 2 withering grasps (level 15 soldier)

Level 19 Encounter (XP 12,400)
- 2 chillspark (level 20 skirmisher)
- 1 human diabolist (level 20 artillery; *Monster Manual 2*, page 144)
- 1 greater helmed horror (level 18 elite soldier; *Monster Manual*, page 155)

About the Author

Peter Lee works as a game designer for Wizards of the Coast, where he splits his time between RPG design and leading the design for *D&D Miniatures*.

Explore Fairhaven: Villains and Vagabonds

By Jeff LaSala

illustration by David Rapoza ✦ cartography by Sean MacDonald

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"Let the Queen and her royal hounds fix their eyes on Galifar's vacant throne. Let them fret about the future. Long as they're not looking down here where the real work's done, we'll all get along swimmingly. Down here, there's those who rule the streets . . . and those who think they do."

HEROIC
1–10

Fairhaven is a city of magic and royal intrigue, its glittering spires a symbol of the very heights of Aundairian power. Beneath the shining veneer, criminal lords prey upon the weak, and ancient forces of evil conspire with undying patience. Then there are those without an elaborate agenda, who are merely too self-serving or independent to align with schemes outside of their own. These are the survivalists of Fairhaven, itinerant rogues and knaves—wayward souls, perhaps not so unlike adventurers. See *Dungeon*® #170 for more information on the city.

Dharvek, War Profiteer

A recent arrival to the city's smuggler trade and an upstart rival to the gang lord Kreelo, the elf named Dharvek is still sought by the Sentinel Marshals of House Deneith for years of war profiteering. He maintains a hidden storehouse of illegal weapons deep in the Whiteroof Ward, guarded well by deadly traps and animate constructs. Rumors within Fairhaven's underworld hold that Dharvek's vault includes a cache of experimental arms spirited away from the city of Eston before the Day of Mourning.

Too vain to assume an epithet like infamous masterminds, Dharvek is a criminal of unknown scruples and devious stratagems. He amasses wealth but spends it quickly, strengthening his resources and eschewing decadence. The dusky tone of his skin suggests the presence of drow blood in his ancestry, but this rumor only makes his exploits, origins, and motives all the more mysterious. Yet there may be some truth to the tales: Nearly fifty years ago, Dharvek started his criminal career in the gutters of Stormreach, Xen'drik's outpost of civilization, and left that perilous city behind only when more than one Storm Lord put a bounty on his head.

Dharvek in Combat

As a scavenger of the Last War, Dharvek is equally dangerous in alley altercations as on more traditional fields of battle. He is a survivalist, employing an assortment of martial and magical techniques to strike from afar and keep his enemies at bay. If things go south, he uses *scavenger's survival* to slip away – through walls, if necessary.

Dharvek's Roustabouts

To avoid entrapment, Dharvek retains only a small group of loyal hirelings.

Level 8 Encounter (XP 1,802)

- ✦ Dharvek (level 10 artillery)
- ✦ 1 half-elf con artist (level 7 controller; *Monster Manual*® *2*, page 138)
- ✦ 1 half-elf bandit captain (level 6 skirmisher; *Monster Manual 2*, page 138)
- ✦ 4 half-elf smugglers (level 6 minions, *Dungeon* #155)

Hook: Introducing Dharvek

Dharvek prefers a fluid business. As a purveyor of illicit magic weaponry, he knows that adventurers are the best resource for unloading contraband or acquiring more. Sometimes he funds expeditions into the Mournland in search of more "merchandise" and is willing to hire adventurers for such a purpose. But PCs are just as likely to cross blades with Dharvek as work with him, especially if Fairhaven's elite or the Royal Eyes wish to investigate him. Sentinel Marshals and Tharashk bounty hunters search for him still; they may be willing to enlist further assistance. Dharvek often makes his deals at the Underquay.

Dharvek	**Level 10 Elite Artillery**
Medium fey humanoid, elf	XP 1,000
Initiative +7	**Senses** Perception +9; low-light vision
Group Awareness aura 5; non-elf allies in the aura gain a +1 racial bonus to Perception checks.	
HP 164; **Bloodied** 82	
AC 23; **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 24, **Will** 23	
Saving Throws +2	
Speed 7; see also *scavenger's survival*	
Action Points 1	
Short Sword (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon** +17 vs. AC; 1d6 + 5 damage.	
Shortbow (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon** Ranged 15/30; +17 vs. AC; 2d6 + 4 damage.	
Burning Arrow (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon, Fire** Ranged 15/30; +17 vs. AC; 2d8 + 4 damage, and ongoing 10 fire damage (save ends).	
Twin Arrows (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon** Dharvek makes two *shortbow* attacks.	
Shocking Dissuasion (standard; recharge ⚅) ✦ **Lightning** Close burst 2; +15 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 4 lightning damage, and the target is pushed 2 squares.	
Elven Accuracy (free; encounter) Dharvek can reroll an attack roll. He must use the second roll, even if it's lower.	
Scavenger's Survival (move; encounter) Dharvek shifts 3 squares and gains phasing during this movement.	
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Common, Elven, Giant
Skills Bluff +16, Insight +14, Stealth +15, Thievery +15	
Str 13 (+7)	**Dex** 15 (+7) **Wis** 18 (+9)
Con 16 (+8)	**Int** 18 (+9) **Cha** 14 (+7)
Equipment leather armor, longsword, shortbow, 2 daggers	

Fherina, Persistent Chronicler

An artful chronicler and freelance investigator for the *Korranberg Chronicle*, Fherina Arvindi writes and sells sensationalist stories for a living. Like most gnomes of Zilargo, she craves information and the secrets of those around her. She has chosen Fairhaven for its political intrigue, its obsession with arcane and higher learning, and its centralized commerce among the Five Nations. Assuming the penname Fherina Heartsvale, Investigative Chronicler, she is often found poking around both the University of Wynarn and the Chalice Center, seeking inspiration for the perfect story.

Fherina in Combat

Fherina loathes combat and will shy away from it at every opportunity, sometimes leaving allies in a lurch. If it's clear that a battle is swinging in her favor, she will linger to bear witness ("Every good story's got to have strife!"), offering her *arcane quip* to speed things along and *muckrake* to erode an enemy's bluster.

Fherina's Protection

The best reporting is done solo, but snooping around where one isn't welcome often requires bodyguards. If not encountered alone, Fherina surrounds herself with hired muscle.

Level 4 Encounter (XP 875)

- ✦ Fherina (level 5 skirmisher)
- ✦ 2 Blademark grunts (level 3 soldier; Eberron® *Campaign Guide*, page 213)
- ✦ 3 human ruffians (level 2 skirmisher; *Dungeon* #155)

Hook: Catching Fherina's Attention

If the PCs are roped into a political, criminal, or otherwise intriguing plot within Fairhaven (the juicier the better!), Fherina catches wind of it. She places herself deftly in their path, offering her services to them as an inquisitive, a guide, or a locksmith magewright—whatever might fulfill their need and garner their trust. In truth, Fherina just wants to observe them, learn their secrets and their pasts, write a story about them, and sell it. She may even publish a serial about the PCs as a special edition of the *Korranberg Chronicle* or a national broadsheet like the *Aundairian Scroll*. Such an act might turn an otherwise private party of adventurers into local celebrities—whether they like it or not. Depending on the PCs' needs, this could work *in* their favor or quite against it.

Fherina	**Level 5 Skirmisher**
Small fey humanoid, gnome	XP 200
Initiative +5	**Senses** Perception +9, low-light vision
HP 63; **Bloodied** 31	
AC 18; **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 19	
Speed 5	
Short Sword (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
+8 vs. AC; 1d4 + 2 damage.	
Arcane Quip (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**	
Ranged 5; +9 vs. Will; 1d10 + 5 psychic damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends).	
Scathing Retort (immediate reaction, when Fherina is hit or missed by an attack; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**	
Close burst 5; targets the triggering attacker; the attacker gains vulnerable 10 psychic until the end of Fherina's next turn.	
Fade Away (immediate reaction, when Fherina takes damage; encounter) ✦ **Illusion**	
Fherina becomes invisible until she attacks or until the end of her next turn.	
Muckrake (free, when Fherina damages an enemy; encounter)	
The target takes a -2 penalty to Will defense (save ends).	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** Common, Elven
Skills Bluff +12, Insight +9, Streetwise +10, Thievery +8	
Str 10 (+2)	**Dex** 13 (+3) **Wis** 14 (+4)
Con 15 (+4)	**Int** 15 (+4) **Cha** 16 (+5)
Equipment leather armor, 2 daggers, blank book, 5 inkpens	

Ralsor: Scion, Pilot, Scoundrel

House Lyrandar, bearer of the Mark of Storm, is well known for producing a host of celebrated navigators and upstanding scions. Ralsor d'Lyrandar, airship pilot and dragonmarked heir, isn't one of them. His relationship with his house is in a state of constant flux, marked by frequent embarrassments and ongoing, if empty, threats of excoriation. Yet his family is highly esteemed and well established, its coffers heavy with gold. Ralsor even owns the ship he pilots, assuming the role of both helmsman and captain though his crew is usually quite scarce. In truth, he is a masterful steersman who merely plays the part of an irresponsible and lousy pilot to avoid entanglement in the commercial obligations of the house. His membership in the Windwrights Guild was last revoked when he damaged *yet another* docking tower platform with the hull of his ship. Fairhaven's Sky Knights, who ride the winds above the city on their dragonhawks, all know of Ralsor and despise him for his antics.

Ralsor considers himself an aerial vagabond, tethered to nothing but his ship—the *Thunderhead*, which has certainly seen better days—and the friends he takes. His closest approximation to home is Fairhaven, and he docks frequently at the Third Tower to visit with his longtime friend, Phorif Mirador of the Cellar Council. He avoids his kinsmen at the Chalice Center.

Ralsor in Combat

Ralsor is a swaggering combatant, using hit-and-run maneuvers. A swashbuckler at heart, he uses *point-blank skewer* to impress allies and surprise enemies. Ralsor summons both wind and thunder with the power of his dragonmark to *throw caution to the storm* when his enemies get too close.

Ralsor's Motley Crew

Ralsor likes a good scuffle to keep life interesting, but he relies on the heavy lifting of his threadbare crew when pressed into a real fight.

Level 6 Encounter (XP 1,375)

- ✦ Ralsor (level 7 elite skirmisher)
- ✦ 2 human guards (level 3 soldier; *Monster Manual*, page 162)
- ✦ 3 human lackeys (level 7 minion; *Monster Manual*, page 162)
- ✦ 1 warforged resounder (level 6 artillery; *Monster Manual 2*, page 206)

Hook: Riding with Ralsor

Ralsor and the *Thunderhead* are the perfect means for shuttling the characters to and from Fairhaven, especially if the characters haven't got a stellar reputation themselves. Ralsor will fly from the city to just about anywhere and won't ask too many questions unless his passengers become friends or if he suspects real evil is afoot. Alternatively, he can be encountered somewhere else altogether; although he often goes abroad, Ralsor inevitably returns to the city for frequent ship repairs . . . and mischief. The *Thunderhead* has seen more than one quest to protect the relic hidden beneath the Third Tower, and Ralsor expects to see more. He might even enlist the PCs' help, in exchange for free airship travel time.

Ralsor d'Lyrandar **Level 7 Elite Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid, half-elf XP 600

Initiative +9 **Senses** Perception +5; low-light vision
HP 152; **Bloodied** 76
AC 19; **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 19
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6
Action Points 1

Flourishing Rapier (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+12 vs. AC; 1d8 + 6 damage, and Ralsor shifts 1 square.

Hand Crossbow (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 6/12; +12 vs. AC; 2d6 + 4 damage.

Bladed Comeback (immediate reaction, when Ralsor takes damage; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+10 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 6 damage.

Point-Blank Skewer (standard; recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃) ✦ **Weapon**
Ralsor makes one *rapier* attack and one *hand crossbow* attack against the same target without provoking opportunity attacks. He can shift 1 square before, after, or between the attacks.

Throw Caution to the Storm (standard; encounter) ✦ **Thunder**
Close burst 1; +10 vs. Fortitude; 4d10 + 4 thunder damage, and the target is pushed 1. If Ralsor misses all targets with this attack, he grants combat advantage until the end of his next turn.

Windy Retreat (free, when Ralsor hits with a melee attack; at-will)
If Ralsor is dazed or immobilized, that condition ends. In addition, Ralsor shifts 1 square.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven
Str 14 (+5) **Dex** 18 (+7) **Wis** 12 (+4)
Con 12 (+4) **Int** 15 (+5) **Cha** 16 (+6)
Equipment cloth armor, hand crossbow, rapier, case with 20 bolts

Staunch, Warforged Mercenary

Not all criminals in Fairhaven employ theft, blackmail, or trickery. Some simply seize what they want with brute force—or with the aid of a blazing crossbow. Staunch, a crippled warforged artificer and former artillerist of the Aundairian Army, is just such an individual. Embittered by his injuries and less than appreciative for what he considers "inadequate compensation," he now hires himself out to anyone with a bone to pick with the Aundairian crown. Staunch usually serves as his employers' armorer or sometimes as a head of operations for whatever thugs or grunts they retain. Recently, he's been in contact with the Emerald Claw cell that hides within the ir'Uvanto family estate.

Staunch's lower left leg was destroyed by some eldritch device of Cyran design during the Last War. No artificer, wizard, or magewright has ever been able to repair or replace it, so he's built a harness around the stump with an enchanted wheel attached. This repurposing has given Staunch a slow, distinctive gait—and a surprising edge in combat. But for this unforgivable slight, he is delighted by the destruction of Cyre and openly mocks its survivors; he applauds Queen Aurala's rejection of Cyran refugees. Staunch's nihilist worldview has made him resistant to intimidation and unafraid of death.

Staunch in Combat

Staunch shies from no fight. He was forged for war and fully expects to meet oblivion in one. He uses his customized *armbow* to launch fiery bolts or blast opponents with *incendiary spray*. Although he moves slowly, his wheel-foot allows him to pivot quickly and keep his opponents at bay. Staunch uses *grinding wheel* to knock his foes down.

Staunch's Allies

When not surrounded by his employers' goons, Staunch shares the company of likeminded warforged unsatisfied with sovereign authority. Many have even defected from the organized service of the Lord of Blades.

Level 10 Encounter (XP 2,975)

- ✦ Staunch (level 12 elite controller)
- ✦ 5 human lackeys (level 7 minion; *Monster Manual*, page 162)
- ✦ 2 human slavers (level 8 brute; *Monster Manual 2*, page 149)
- ✦ 2 warforged captains (level 6 soldier; *Monster Manual*, page 261)

Hook: Contending With Staunch

Parties willing to treat with criminals might be able to hire Staunch, though his price is exorbitant. Employing this belligerent warforged is an ordeal in itself. He is not content to take casual orders from anyone, especially not breathers. As a construct and a nihilist, he respects only power, magic, and material wealth; spiritualism or higher ideals mean nothing to him. Most characters will encounter Staunch in their enemy's service, overseeing the heavy lifting of some deadly operation, and will probably exchange arrow-fire before words. But . . . he can *always* be bought.

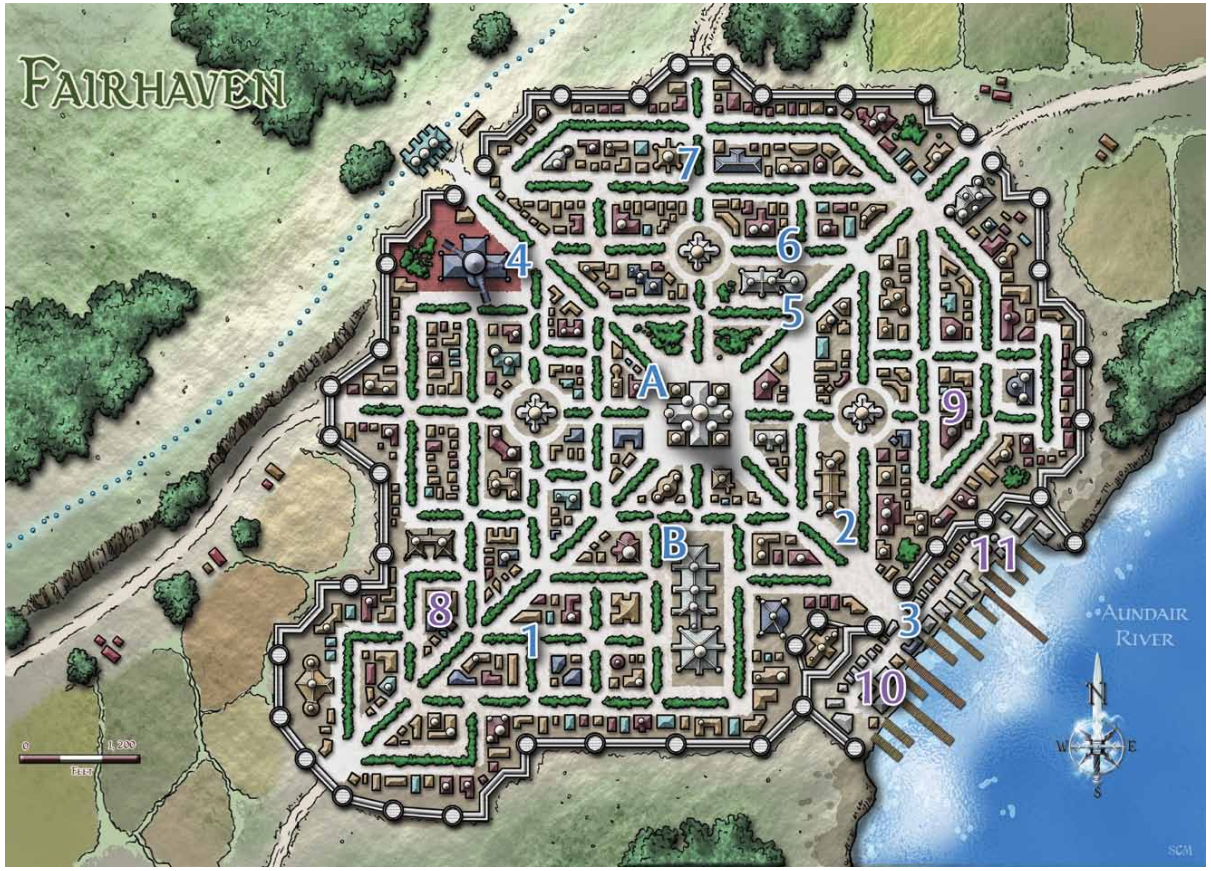
Staunch	**Level 12 Elite Controller**
Medium natural humanoid (living construct), warforged	XP 1,400
Initiative +7	**Senses** Perception +10
HP 246; **Bloodied** 123	
AC 26; **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 25	
Saving Throws +2	
Speed 4	
Action Points 1	
Icy Warhammer (standard; at-will) ✦ **Cold, Weapon** +17 vs. AC; 1d10 + 5 damage plus 1d6 cold damage, and the target is slowed until the end of Staunch's next turn.	
Fiery Armbow (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire, Weapon** Ranged 10; +17 vs. AC; 1d8 + 4 damage plus 1d6 fire damage.	
Incendiary Spray (standard; recharge ⚅) ✦ **Fire, Zone** Close blast 3; +16 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 5 fire damage, and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends). The burst becomes an incendiary zone that lasts until the end of Staunch's next turn. Creatures that end their turns within the zone take 10 fire damage.	
Alchemical Blast (standard; encounter) ✦ **Acid, Thunder** Area burst 2 within 10; +16 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 8 acid and thunder damage, and the target is dazed (save ends). *Miss:* Half damage.	
Grinding Wheel (move; at-will) Staunch shifts up to 4 squares, making the following attack against each creature he moves adjacent to during the shift. Staunch can only target a given creature once during each use of *grinding wheel*. +16 vs. Fortitude; the target falls prone.	
Uncanny Pivot (move; at-will) Staunch gains a +2 bonus to AC, Fortitude, and Reflex until he moves.	
Warforged Resolve (minor, usable only while bloodied; encounter) Staunch gains 14 temporary hit points.	
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Common
Str 14 (+0)	**Dex** 12 (+7) **Wis** 19 (+11)
Con 19 (+11)	**Int** 19 (+11) **Cha** 12 (+7)
Equipment chainmail, warhammer	

Lurks and Lairs

Fairhaven is well known for its universities and libraries, its temples, and its beautiful white towers. But what of some of its lesser known sites, the sorts of places a newcomer only finds by ill repute or mere happenstance?

8. The Third Tower

When a massive fire destroyed the upscale inn known as the Peryton's Pride only a few years ago, the proprietor, a retired soldier named Phorif Mirador, rented the surface of the estate to House Lyrandar for a surprisingly low sum. His only condition: build around the intact foundations of the inn, what had once been a vast wine cellar. Soon after, Fairhaven's third and smallest airship docking tower was erected on the site. Situated in the southwestern corner of the city in the residential Laurelbough District, the Third Tower, as it has come to be known, is the newest and least trafficked of House Lyrandar's docking towers in Fairhaven and sees more private than commercial use. A door just inside the ground floor is marked "Cellar Council," and leads to what used to be the basement of the previous establishment.



Cellar Council: More a watering hole than a proper tavern, this basement bar has become a haunt for anarchists, malcontents, and outspoken critics of the crown. The worst of their rebellious claims—usually just liquor-driven rants—are surreptitiously steered away from talk of revolution by Phorif himself, proprietor and barkeep. The veteran uses the Cellar Council and the presence of House Lyrandar activity above to divert attention from what he has sworn to protect: a powerful relic that he and other soldiers of his unit discovered in a Dhakaani ruin just inside the Cyran border several years before the Day of Mourning. The mystic object, now hidden in a vault below the cellar, has bound Phorif to its fate. Only one other knows this secret: his friend Ralsor d'Lyrandor, an airship pilot who frequently docks his ship at the Third Tower.

9. Ir'Uvanto Family Antiquities

On the edge of the Sovereign Ward, and in view of the city's largest temples, is a stately manor belonging to the noble ir'Uvanto family. This old Aundairian family lost most of its fortunes, its holdings, and its children during the Last War, and has struggled ever since to maintain both reputation and a high standard of living. The nobles make their living now by selling a vast collection of gems, jewelry, and *objets d'art*, many of which have been looted from the family's own mausoleums. The gallery itself, known as ir'Uvanto Family Antiquities, occupies the ground floor of the manor and is open to the public.

Claws in the Dark: Bitterness and desperation drove the family's patriarch, Arvos ir'Uvanto, to betray his country by accepting an offer he couldn't refuse: His estate has now become a safe house for the Order of the Emerald Claw. With a hidden cell operating in the very shadow of Fairhold, agents of the Order work to insinuate themselves in the city's more esteemed institutions and network with its criminals. Not all members of the ir'Uvanto family approve of the Order's presence, but the most reluctant have been silenced by savage threats. Still, if any of these sent out a servant to find help, they might be willing to talk if they could be guaranteed protection.

10. Vorenn's Walk

In 967 YK, a favored member of Fairhaven's aristocracy—and a sorcerer of no small power—set to betray the city to the Thranes by selling them royal secrets. Although the crown was none the wiser at the time, word of this act reached the ears of Fairhaven's criminal element. On the night the nobleman intended to flee the city, he walked calmly from his manse to where a ship waited to bear him safely away. But as he passed through a corner alley in the Whiteroof Ward, more than twenty Aundairian outlaws descended on him with daggers. He did not emerge—but neither did his killers. Today, the alley that bears his name is believed to be haunted with his ghost and those of twenty criminals. Though many stories are told of this event, most claim that both betrayal and sorcery cursed the place of his death.

Street Judgement: Local superstition holds that anyone who enters the alley and bears ill intent against the city will face the spirits of betrayal. Real or not, even the most intrepid of Fairhaven's criminals choose to go the long way around this part of the district. Characters with knowledge of the undead might be asked to investigate the haunting, especially if the spirits of the legend have been seen leaving Vorren's Walk. But how does one find suitable bait?

11. The Underquay

While most legitimate river trade operates through the dockhouses of the Whiteroof Ward, a select number of Fairhaven's underworld elite have a resource of their own. Flushed to the northeast edge of the wharf is a quay of cracked stone seemingly used for damaged ships. An unassuming dockhouse is perched on one corner and is accessed only by a single door inscribed with invisible runes of warding. Within lies the Underquay, a surprisingly large extradimensional space that serves as tavern, canteen, and customs house to the powerful and lawless. Those who try to report the Underquay find that some of the authorities have been paid off, and that their days are now numbered.

Deadly Discretion: Characters who learn the watchword of entry into the Underquay find themselves rubbing elbows with the worst of Fairhaven's criminal element. Here the gang lord Kreelo (in one of his many faces) might meet with corrupt officials, disreputable visitors, or greedy merchants wishing to scare off their rivals. The war profiteer known as Dharvek often comes for business or to trade insults with Dark Dagger rogues. Those who come looking for trouble—or for a smuggler unafraid to break some bones—will find it in the Quay.

About the Author

Jeff LaSala is a writer of speculative fiction and an artificer of RPGs. His Eberron novel, *The Darkwood Mask,* was nominated for the Scribe Award and showcases his love for all things dark, monstrous, and masked. Many of his ideas are drawn from the cthonic depths of New York City, where he (roll 1d4)... (1) Dwells with an Argentine mermaid—and even married her. (2) Masequerades as a normal person. (3) Imagines a world splintered into sorry hemispheres. (4) Lurks like a gargoyle over his website: ashlock.org.

HEROIC
1–10

Hidden Destinies

A Side Trek for 5th-level Characters

By Brian Cortijo
illustration by Evan Shipard

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"Hidden Destinies" is a short Side Trek designed for five characters of 5th level set in the Forgotten Realms. It contains two encounters, each of which can lead to a longer adventure. Both encounters involve an escort quest. You simply pick whichever background option works the best for your campaign, and run the encounter associated with it. Alternatively, you can be combine the two into a larger, more intricate plot involving all of the powerful enemy agencies behind the two attacks described below.

Background

In the Western Heartlands of Faerûn, outside the protective aegis of Elturgard, many folk live in fear of the unknown. In these places, the inhabitants shutter their windows and wait out the night while untold evils—some purely imagined, others terrifyingly real—roam unchecked, looking for the unwary and the unwise.

Nor's Ridge is just such a place, a bowshot from the northern edge of the Werewoods—once known as the Wood of Sharp Teeth. Situated on a high bluff overlooking the Chionthar, this village of some two dozen families has slowly dwindled in the years since the Spellplague, as its residents have moved eastward seeking the protection of Elturel and Fort Morninglord. A trader's market rests at the bottom of the hill, and small, subsistence-level farms line the road leading up to the bluff.

Option 1: The Prophesied Tyrant

In the past month, a young boy, Caom Dynin, began speaking odd, incomprehensible phrases in his sleep. His father, Ydal, sent a message to Fort Morninglord, whose clerics responded that the boy should be brought immediately for examination.

The church of Bane has spies in many places across Faerûn (and elsewhere on Toril), and the clergy of Amaunator is no exception. Verped, a Banite residing at Fort Morninglord, intercepted the original message, and has come to a startling conclusion: The boy, Caom, is not some unfortunate innocent caught up in unknown powers. Verped believes him to be the subject of a long-forgotten prophesy. The boy will grow into the greatest tyrant of this or any age, eclipsing even the Chosen Imperator Fzoul Chembryl and heralding the Black Age of Bane.

To help achieve that end, Verped has dispatched his minion, Adaré, to kidnap the child, so that he can be properly raised to serve the whims of the god of hatred and tyranny. The cultists plan to steal Caom Dynin away to the east, for training among the Banites that dwell south of Berdusk. Adaré is unsure of her instructions, but does not dispute them—were she higher in Bane's favor, then she would be the one issuing commands to Verped. One day, perhaps, things may be different. For now, she obeys.

Option 2: The Wages of Death

Ydal is a diligent farmer, working his fields each day from dusk onward to provide for his family's support. One day, while plowing a newly cleared field, he unearthed an odd, open-faced helm. The eldritch purple lines etched around the nose guard seemed to speak to him. Fearing madness, he resolved to bring the helm with him to Fort Morninglord, and let the priests of Amaunator investigate its mysteries.

Quavor never took well to the strict hierarchy of the Zhentarim. While he craved power above all else, he was rebellious and insolent—but too talented for his masters to simply order his removal. Eventually, they allowed him to ease his way free of the tight strictures of the Zhentarim to go seek more knowledge and power for the greater glory of the group. Although technically still a Zhent (because no one truly leaves the Zhentarim unless dead), Quavor has spent much of the ensuing years studying necromantic spells and rituals, sending periodic updates on his research to his masters. Lately, though, his increasing power brought on the notice of the Eminence of Araunt. Unaware of his other loyalties, they view Quavor as a shrewd young mage, capable of discovering powerful magic that may be of interest to their landless kingdom.

In return for his service in providing the Eminence of Araunt with such relics that he finds, they have granted Quavor access to their own knowledge on controlling and creating undead—knowledge that Quavor gleefully passed up the chain to his overseers in the Zhentarim. They have also set him on the trail of several magic items they hear of. He has returned some of what he finds to the agents of the Eminence of Araunt, enough to maintain the veneer of loyalty. The rest of his finds he has kept for himself or sent home.

The most recent lead came from an Araunt spy in Fort Morninglord. A local farmer—Ydal Dynin—had sent word of an item found in one of his fields. The helm matched the description of a *helm of Deldren*. The Eminence of Araunt wants the item at any cost, and they have dispatched Quavor to retrieve it. He also knows that the Zhentarim will want the helm for themselves, so he plans to steal the helm and return to the relative safety of his allies in the nearest Zhentarim cell. The Eminence believes that the *helm of Deldren* might have once been used in the creation of exceptionally powerful helmed horrors, and wishes to study it in the hope of improving their own direhelms, or incorporating this new magic into an even more powerful sort of construct.

Make Your Choice

As DM, you'll need to choose whether the players face Adaré and her cultists, Quavor and his undead creatures, or both. Each encounter presents different kinds of challenges and employs different tactics against the players, but this choice also determines the course of the story going forward—and, if you choose, a larger adventure to follow. Before making your decision, read through both encounters, and the suggested adventure plots in the Conclusion. You know your group and its preferences, and should be

able to craft a memorable adventure from the threads provided. One plotline encourages the PCs to actively seek out evils in the region, while the other makes the players react to a threat that is coming after them.

The Banite encounter will set the players on a trail to stop them from kidnapping Caom and turning him into their prophesied tyrant, eventually bringing them into direct conflict with the servant of Bane lurking among the priests of Amaunator at Fort Morninglord.

The encounter with the Eminence of Araunt's agent will put the characters in the crosshairs of that organization as enemies to be eliminated. It will also put them afoul of the local Zhentarim faction, which could escalate to a large-scale and long-running feud between the characters and the Zhents.

If you choose to run both encounters, you can weave the resulting plots together with one another, having the Eminence pursue the players and the *helm of Deldren* while the party is investigating Banite influence in the area.

Getting the PCs Involved

The players are passing north of the Werewoods to skirt around the dangers the forest presents—despite their experience, they're not quite hardy enough to survive the woods for long. Depending on which of the adventures you choose for your players to pursue, the following hooks are suitable for drawing the PCs into the adventure.

Divine Intervention: A divine PC receives a vision from her deity of the path to Nor's Ridge, along with a sense of disquiet about the happenings there.

Long-distance Reconnaissance: The knights of Elturgard fear that some distant settlements along the Chionthar have lost touch with the light of the gods. The PCs are hired to investigate a number of such villages, and Nor's Ridge is the first of them.

Rumors Galore: A passing traveler informs the players of the strange happenings in Nor's Ridge: after years of quiet, there is a disturbing amount of news coming out of the place.

Dispatch from Fort Morninglord: Some business brought the characters to Fort Morninglord. While they are there, they are hired by the temple of Amaunator to travel to Nor's Ridge and escort Caom or the helm (depending on your hook) back to the fort for protection. No one in the church knows how important either the child or the helm are, so the characters are given little warning of the perils they're about to face.

Starting the Adventure

When the PCs come upon the Nor's Ridge trademeet, they are approached by Ravker, the unofficial spokesman for the village, who implores them to accompany the wagon in which either Ydal and his son, or Ydal and the helm, will depart the next day. If the players refuse or seem disinterested, Ydal tries to convince them to come along, suggesting that they may be handsomely rewarded if he can make it to Fort Morninglord safely (along with Caom or the helm, of course).

If even this doesn't convince them, and you're using background option 1, you can roleplay Caom acting in an abusive manner toward other children at the trademeet, an unholy light emanating from his stark green eyes as he commands them to recover something for him, and they obey, seemingly against their own natures.

If you're using option 2, the helm in Ydal's possession suddenly begins to burn with a strange fire, and nearby animals begin to panic and stampede in circles in the area. Ravker and Ydal are able to calm the creatures, but the episode should convince the characters this request for aid is not without merit.

Regardless of whether you choose for the PCs to fight Adaré, Quavor, or to fight one and then the other, the map for the encounter is the same, as is the basic premise: while escorting their charge (Caom or the helm) and Ydal through the outer forests of the Werewoods, the wagon is attacked and disabled. The characters must stop the attackers, and in the aftermath of the battle stumble onto a larger plot than they expected.

The wagon itself is weak, and provides little protection for Caom, who rides inside. Ydal acts last in the initiative order on the first round of the encounter, fleeing inside the wagon and bolting the door behind him.

Treasure

You can use the encounter with the Banites to give one of the players a magic weapon or armor they've been waiting for. Award the characters a level 5 parcel from the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, page 126, awarding any of the first four parcels as you desire.

Awarding treasure for the encounter with Quavor is a bit more difficult, because of the lack of intelligent creatures. Still, a magic implement or a ritual book of comparable value to a level 5 treasure is a suitable reward.

Attacking Caom and Ydal

Although vital to the plot of the adventure, Caom and Ydal are not invulnerable to attack. Through their own actions or inaction, the characters might witness the death of one or the other of these characters.

The wagon provides protection for those inside, but cannot stand up to much abuse: it has AC and Reflex scores of 6, a Fortitude of 12, and 30 hit points. Once destroyed, anyone inside the wreckage has cover, but no further protection from outside attacks.

Caom and Ydal have defenses of 11 (including AC), and only 1 hp. Treat them as minions for most purposes—a missed attack does no damage to either of them, but a hit automatically reduces them to 0 hp. Unlike other minions, however, you can opt to grant them death saves as you would the characters once they're knocked to 0 hp, allowing the characters a chance to save them and adding another element of tension to the encounter.

In short, tailor the treasure to the player's needs and desires. If you run both encounters, you can feel free to make the treasure a little more valuable for one than the other.

Conclusion

Although they can be used as simple one-off encounters, these battles are intended as introductions to larger, ongoing plots.

Expanding the Bane Threat

If you expand the first encounter with the Banites into a longer adventure, here are some tips for the final showdown with Verped. It's also possible that one of the Banite converts manages to snatch Caom and run off. Should the players fail in the encounter, Adaré or the convert brings Caom to her fellow Banites. If Ydal survived the meeting, he implores the party to seek out his son and save him before it is too late to keep the boy from being corrupted.

For later encounters, use a mixture of the villains presented in the first encounter and those from other sources (such as the *D&D Compendium*) for the Banites the players will face.

If they battle Adaré and defeat her and her cultists, the players discover a message from Verped with instructions to take Caom to their camp near Berdusk. There, they discover a small-but-growing camp of Banites, supplemented by frightened and frustrated commoners who turn to the Black Lord for order and stability. They find the hand of Elturgard too heavy, and its justice unyielding in the face of the real dangers and trials that normal people face every day.

After discovering the camp and defeating its leaders, the players discover evidence that Adaré was working in the service of Verped out of Fort Morninglord. What follows is a complex social encounter with the leaders of Amaunator's clergy to investigate their fortress and root out the Banite influence, concluding with a battle against Verped himself.

Verped is a powerful priest of Bane, and he has slowly converted a few of the knights of Amaunator to his way of thinking. The final battle between Verped and the PCs should be difficult, at least two levels above that of the PCs'. Defeating Verped results in the elimination of the Banite infiltrators in the fort, a possible alliance with the clerics of Amaunator, and a definite increase in reputation among the people of Elturgard.

Expanding the Eminent of Araunt and Zhentarim Threat

Quavor wants nothing more than to succeed in serving the Zhentarim, and in doing so be granted increased magical power. Once the players defeat him, both the Eminence of Araunt and the local Zhentarim turn their attention to Ydal and the *helm of Deldren*. Ydal explains that his intention was to leave the helm with the priests of Amaunator, but he now believes that the PCs might be better keepers of the relic than even the clerics of the sun god.

If the players decide to deliver the *helm of Deldren* to Fort Morninglord anyway, they are told of its history: The helm once belonged to Deldren Nor, a minor warrior from just after the first fall of Netheril, who died defending the small settlement that now bears his name. They can divine nothing of its connection to any magic or undead processes—it seems like a normal *helm of opportunity* to them—and the priests of Amaunator allow the characters to keep the helm.

The Eminence of Araunt, however, is not pleased with this arrangement, and sends agents to attack the characters the first night that they make camp outside a settled town. Harried by weaker undead over the course of several days, a pattern emerges, and the players are eventually able to track their movements to a nearby mass grave, which the Eminence of Araunt uses as a portal to one of its headquarters. Stumbling (or forced) through the portal, the party discovers a small cadre of intelligent undead that assault them immediately. This hidden mausoleum is the base of the attacks the characters have suffered, and defeating its occupants causes the ambushes to stop.

Even if the players leave the region and are able to avoid the attacks of the Eminence of Araunt, they have made a lifelong foe—an enemy that is patient beyond measure. As their careers progress, they might suffer attacks from banshees, ghosts, skull lords, and other, even more powerful undead, until they finally find a way to end the threat of the Eminence of Araunt permanently.

The local Zhentarim cell is likewise aware of the helm. They too want its power, but are less inclined to go to the ends of the earth to retrieve it. The Zhentarim here can be an excellent red herring—the real threat is the Eminence of Araunt, especially if you decide that the priests of Amaunator are incorrect, and that the *helm of Deldren* is more than it appears. (If it is actually capable of some greater magic associated with the undead, for example.) The Zhentarim also seek to avenge the loss of Quavor, who as an excellent local source of magic and valuable relics. If the characters pursue any leads, they are eventually led to the cell's headquarters for the region in Elturel. There they can learn about Quavor's role as a double agent and ties to the Eminence of Araunt.

Weaving the Threads

Running both of the encounters presented herein presents a number of interesting possibilities. What does Ydal do, with Caom safely among the priests of Amaunator and the helm out of his possession? How do the players balance their attempts to find the Banites with the constant harrying of the undead on their trail?

How you decide to balance the two plots is entirely up to you, but be careful to monitor the enjoyment of your group. A strong story is important, but ultimately, if one or the other threads doesn't grab your players, you should ease away from it and focus on what's fun for everyone.

Ongoing Adventures

You might choose to have the themes in this adventure pop up multiple times over the course of an ongoing campaign. Perhaps the Banites were wrong about Caom, and he has the potential to be a strong force for good *or* evil, depending on the path he chooses and the mentors who guide him—or perhaps they were right, and he turns to Bane despite his time at Fort Morninglord. It's possible that Ydal Dynin cursed, to have two such occurrences fall into his life so closely together, and he continues to turn to the party for aid. Certainly, earning the attention of the Eminence of Araunt is not a good thing, but given the enemies the Eminence has been earning—Thay, the Twisted Rune, and others—the PCs might find themselves allied with Araunt against what seems like a greater enemy.

Banite Ambush

Encounter Level 5 (1075 XP)

Setup

Adaré, acolyte of Bane (A)
8 Banite converts (C)
1 zealot of Bane (Z)

Adaré and his recruits make an attempt to kidnap their charge.

When the PCs enter the clearing, read:

The wagon finally makes it free of the narrow path and has nearly reached its destination. Just as it clears the edge of the trees, a pole thrusts out of the brush and through the spokes of the wagon's rear wheels, causing both to break as it spins around to the axle. A group of figures steps forward, spurred on by a woman in black-trimmed chainmail and green robes, who screams, "Grab the boy. Kill the rest!"

8 Banite Converts (C) **Level 5 Minion**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 50

Initiative +5 **Senses** Perception +3
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
AC 19; **Fortitude** 19; **Reflex** 17; **Will** 17
Speed 6

⊕ **Battleaxe** (standard; at-will) ◻ **Weapon**
+9 vs. AC; 4 damage

Tyranny of the Mob
A human cultist gains a +1 power bonus to all defenses and a +1 power bonus to attack rolls while at least two other Banite converts are within 5 squares of it.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common
Str 18 (+6) **Dex** 13 (+3) **Wis** 13 (+3)
Con 14 (+4) **Int** 10 (+2) **Cha** 9 (+1)
Equipment battleaxe

Zealot of Bane (Z) **Level 6 Elite Brute**
Medium natural humanoid XP 500

Initiative +4 **Senses** Perception +11
HP 168; **Bloodied** 84
AC 18; **Fortitude** 17; **Reflex** 16; **Will** 15
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6
Action Points 1

⊕ **Greatsword** (standard; at-will) ◻ **Weapon**
+9 vs. AC; 1d10 + 8 (crit 1d10 + 20) damage

Double Attack (standard; at-will) ◻ Weapon
The zealot of Bane makes two *greatsword* attacks. If both attacks hit the same target, the target is knocked prone.

You Will Kneel (standard; recharge ⚅) ◻ **Weapon**
Close burst 1; +9 vs. AC; 1d10 + 8 damage, and the target is pushed 1 square and knocked prone.

Mark of Loathing (standard; encounter) ◻ **Fear**
Close burst 5; targets one creature; the target is marked and grants combat advantage to the zealot of Bane's allies (save ends).

Brute Rush
When a zealot of Bane makes a bull rush attack, the target is pushed 2 squares instead of 1 square.

Martyr's Farewell (when the zealot of Bane is reduced to 0 hit points or fewer) ◻ **Fear**
The zealot of Bane makes a *greatsword* attack against all enemies within reach. A target struck by this attack has a -2 penalty on attack rolls until the end of the zealot's next turn in addition to taking damage.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common
Str 18 (+7) **Dex** 12 (+4) **Wis** 16 (+6)
Con 14 (+5) **Int** 11 (+3) **Cha** 8 (+2)
Equipment greatsword, chainmail armor

Adaré, Adept of Bane (A) **Level 4 Controller (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 175

Initiative +3 **Senses** Perception +10
HP 58; **Bloodied** 29
AC 18; **Fortitude** 18; **Reflex** 13; **Will** 18
Speed 6

⊕ **Mace** (standard; at-will) ◻ **Weapon**
+8 vs. AC; 1d8 + 2 damage.

Dominating Ray (standard; at-will) ◻ **Fear**
Ranged 10; +7 vs. Will; 1d6 + 3 damage, and the target is slowed (save ends).

Withering Glance (standard; recharge ⚀ ⚄ ⚅) ◻ **Necrotic**
Ranged 5; +7 vs. Fortitude; the target takes 5 ongoing necrotic damage and is weakened (save ends both).

Battle Grace (minor 1/round; recharge ⚀ ⚄ ⚅)
Close burst 10; all allies in the burst gain +5 speed until the end of Adaré's next turn.

Bane's Command (standard; encounter)
Close burst 5; bloodied allies in the burst regain 15 hit points.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common
Skills Endurance +10, Religion +10
Str 14 (+4) **Dex** 12 (+3) **Wis** 18 (+6)
Con 18 (+6) **Int** 8 (+1) **Cha** 12 (+3)
Equipment chainmail, mace, holy symbol

Tactics

Adaré immediately employs *battle grace* while the converts advance on the nearest PC. The zealot of Bane moves toward the party, using *mark of loathing* to mark the PC with the most converts adjacent to it. The zealot uses its action point to make a second attack during the first round in which it can make two attacks.

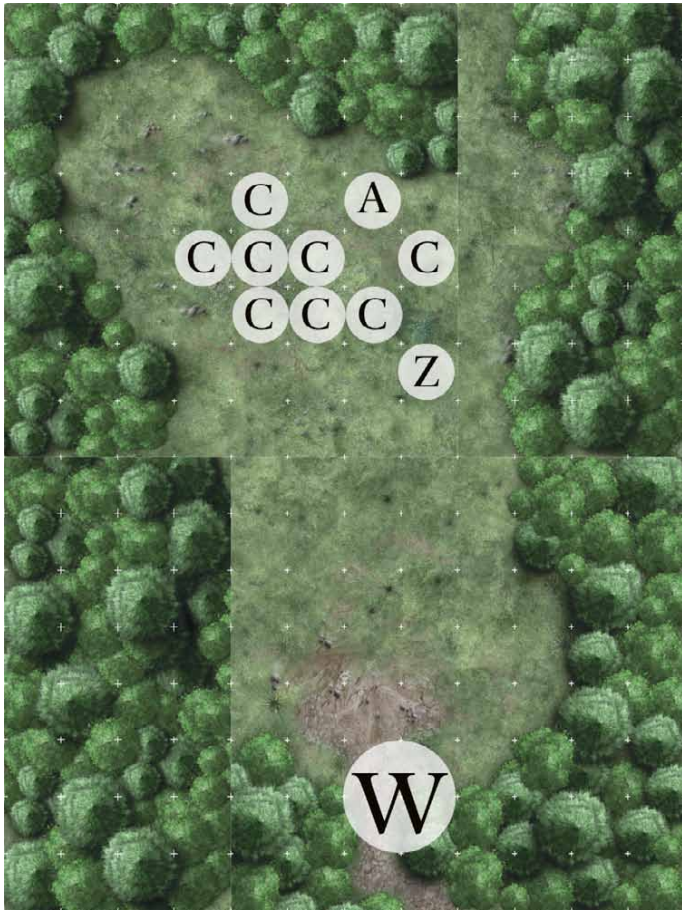
Features of the Area

Illumination: This encounter takes place during the day. All squares are brightly lit, except for those adjacent to the trees, which are dimly lit thanks to the tree canopy.

Trees: The trees surrounding the area are solid and block line of sight and effect. A creature can use a tree as superior cover to targets on the opposite side. An adjacent target around a corner has cover rather than superior cover.

Wagon: The wagon (W) provides protection to characters hiding behind it, but can be damaged to the point of endangering its occupants. A simple Athletics check (DC 10) is enough to vault a character onto the surface of the wagon, and its already-damaged status makes it difficult terrain to walk across.

The wagon provides protection for those inside, but cannot stand up to much abuse: it has AC and Reflex scores of 6, a Fortitude of 12, and 30 hit points. Once destroyed, anyone inside the wreckage has cover, but no further protection from outside attacks. The wagon can hold up to three people, and Caom and Ydal both try to enter it at the end of the first round of combat if there is room.



A Zhent Most Eminent

Encounter Level 5 (1,000 XP)

Setup

1 bear corpse (B)
2 gravehounds (G)
Quavor (Q)

The death mage Quavor comes seeking an ancient prize.

When the PCs enter the clearing, read:

The cart rumbles to a stop, and Ydal's eyes widen in fear. A bear, larger than any natural bear you've ever seen, bounds toward the wagon, the flesh nearly falling off its slavering jaws. Two dogs, rotting skin and viscera hanging in tatters from their ribcages, follow it. The horse breaks free of its reins and bolts as a man steps from the trees a the other end of the clearing, waving a thin rod of iron triumphantly.

If the PCs have already faced the Banites from encounter 1, instead read the following:

Ydal turns white and looks to the east, where a bear and two dogs stare hungrily at him, pins of purple light glowing in their lifeless eyes. The beasts stand stiffly, no breath moving their bodies, as holes in their skin show bone and flesh below. A thin human stands at the end of the clearing, blocking the way east and holding a slim iron rod skyward as the creatures advance.

Bear Corpse (B) **Level 7 Elite Brute**
Large natural animate (undead) XP 600

Initiative +4 **Senses** Perception +10; low-light vision
HP 190; **Bloodied** 95
AC 19; **Fortitude** 20; **Reflex** 17; **Will** 19
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6
Action Points 1

⊕ **Claw** (standard; at-will)
+10 vs. AC; 2d8 + 5

⊕ **Double Attack** (standard; at-will)
The bear corpse makes two *claw* attacks. If both claws hit the same target, the target is grabbed (until escape).

⊕ **Necrotic Crush** (standard; at-will)
Grabbed target only; +8 vs. Fort; 4d8+3 necrotic damage.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 19 (+7) **Dex** 13 (+4) **Wis** 15 (+5)
Con 15 (+5) **Int** 1 (-2) **Cha** 9 (+2)

2 Gravehounds (G) **Level 3 Brute**
Medium natural animate (undead) XP 150

Initiative +2 **Senses** Perception +1; low-light vision
HP 54; **Bloodied** 27
AC 14; **Fortitude** 14; **Reflex** 12; **Will** 11
Immune disease; poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant
Speed 6

⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will) ◻ **Necrotic**
+7 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends) and is knocked prone if it is Medium size or smaller.

⊕ **Death Jaws** (when reduced to 0 hit points) ◻ **Necrotic**
The gravehound makes a bite attack against a target within its reach.

Zombie Weakness
Any critical hit to the zombie reduces it to 0 hit points instantly.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 16 (+4) **Dex** 13 (+2) **Wis** 10 (+1)
Con 14 (+3) **Int** 1 (-4) **Cha** 3 (-3)

Quavor (Q) **Level 6 Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid XP 250

Initiative +6 **Senses** Perception +6
HP 56; **Bloodied** 28
AC 18; **Fortitude** 17; **Reflex** 18; **Will** 19
Speed 6

⊕ **Dagger** (standard; at-will) ◻ **Weapon**
+9 vs. AC; 1d4 damage

⊕ **Magic Missile** (standard; at-will) ◻ **Force**
Ranged 20; +11 vs. Reflex; 2d4 + 6 force damage

Necrotic Flash (standard; encounter) ◻ **Necrotic**
Close burst 3; +9 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 6 necrotic damage, and the target is immobilized until the end of Quavor's next turn

Death Blast (standard; at-will) ◻ **Necrotic**
Area burst 1 within 10; +9 vs. Reflex; 1d6 + 5 necrotic damage

Black Vapors (standard; encounter) ◻ **Poison**
Area burst 3 within 20; +9 vs. Reflex; 1d6 + 5 poison damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 poison damage and a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends both)

Wand of Accuracy (free; encounter) ◻ **Implement**
Requires wand; Quavor gains a +3 bonus to one attack roll.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Chondathan, Common
Skills Arcana +15, Diplomacy +9, Dungeoneering +11, Insight +11
Str 10 (+3) **Dex** 16 (+6) **Wis** 16 (+6)
Con 14 (+5) **Int** 20 (+8) **Cha** 12 (+4)
Equipment dagger, wand

Tactics

The corpse bear and the two gravehounds have no preference for targets, attacking the nearest available target. Quavor uses his *magic missile* attack on lone characters, reserving *necrotic flash* and *death blast* until he can attack as many targets as possible. The mage and his servitors have no use for Ydal, and don't exclude them as targets from their assault. If Quavor can somehow lure the players and their charges away from the wagon, he makes a move for the *helm of Deldren* and then escapes as swiftly as possible, leaving his undead creatures to slow pursuit.

Features of the Area

Illumination: This encounter takes place during the day. All squares are brightly lit, except for those adjacent to the trees, which are dimly lit thanks to the tree canopy.

Trees: The trees surrounding the area are solid and block line of sight and effect. A creature can use a tree as superior cover to targets on the opposite side. An adjacent target around a corner has cover rather than superior cover.

Wagon: The wagon (W) provides protection to characters hiding behind it, but can be damaged to the point of endangering its occupants. A simple Athletics check (DC 10) is enough to vault a character onto the surface of the wagon, and its already-damaged status makes it difficult terrain to walk across.

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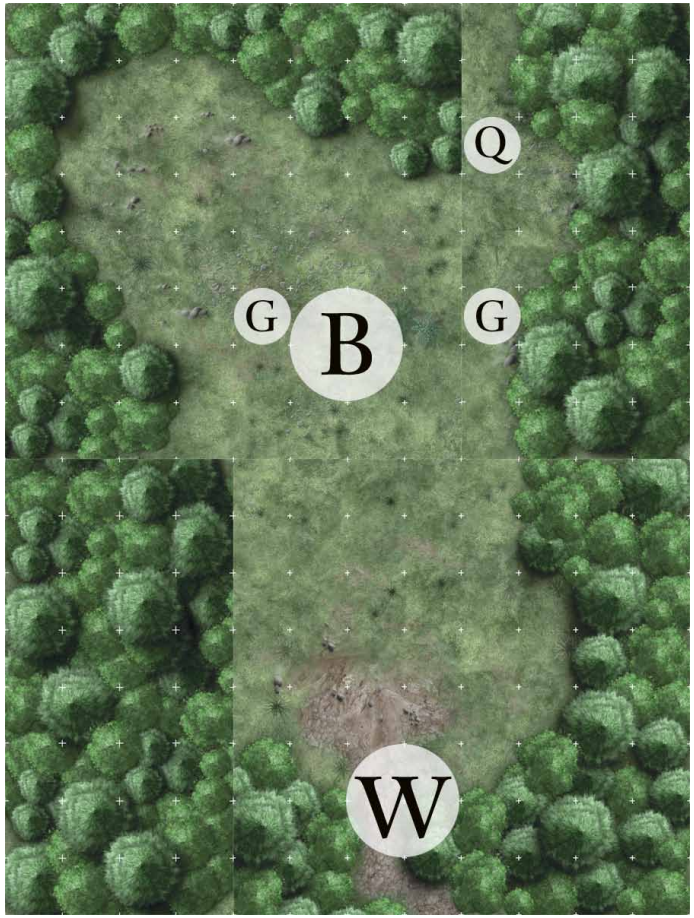

About the Author

Brian is a university minion with dreams of grandeur and delusions of power—which might explain the whole Dungeons & Dragons® thing. Though he plays in lots of imaginary places, he is happiest when he can sneak off into some corner of the Forgotten Realms®, and then tell everyone else about it.

FORGOTTEN REALMS®

Ed Greenwood's Eye on the Realms

The Gentle Ghost of Silverymoon

by Ed Greenwood ✦ illustration by Matias Tapia

Wherever you find battlefields, fortresses, or long-established settlements in the Realms, you will also find hauntings. Many folktales concentrate on the undead or walking dead, those who awaken terror, have fearsome powers, and pose very real dangers to the living. After that, most bards turn to tales of the inexplicable, telling of strange lights or staring eyes where there should be none, doors that open or close by themselves, and items that move about of their own volition. Many such objects—a shoe, a skull, or a skeletal or mummified finger—are tokens of an unseen curse or force that guards a place or family, or lashes out with fell intent at intruders ... or anyone at all.

Yet some, more peaceful apparitions warn or guide the living, or at least individuals of a particular family or clan. One such that has risen to popular notice only recently is a spectral, flying lady elf who has become known as the Gentle Ghost of Silverymoon, called so for her kindly manner.

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Hauntings of Silverymoon

The Gem of the North is a city little troubled by evil or menacing undead, for wards, rituals, and all sorts of other spells have lain thickly upon its walled, older Northbank neighborhoods for centuries. Such magic has also been cast deliberately and in profusion in the newer Southbank as the city expanded. Simply put, most of the usual causes for undeath have been blocked, and those few undead that can be found in Silverymoon take the form of bound guardians like baelnorn, who watch over deep vaults where few citizens or visitors are likely to intrude.

However, this same profusion of warding magic has—according to many sages—played a part in empowering local hauntings. Several examples include:

✦ Spectral, silent wandering cats.

✦ Disembodied voices that whisper long-outdated warnings, longings, or entreaties in particular rooms, passages, or alleyways.

✦ "Anniversary" apparitions seen only on certain days of the year, during certain lunar phases, or commemorating occasions when the Moonbridge was created or augmented. Such ghostly figures consist of silently-hurrying, cloaked, tall elflike beings with drawn swords and long, slender arms and fingers. These creatures drift along streets (and sometimes through walls that now stand where streets or alleyways once were) at great speed, faces inside their cowls missing except for the burning lights of their eyes.

✦ The Frantic Unicorn, an agitated and wild-eyed unicorn that gallops silently across the city with its horn streaming endless red ribbons of blood that is not its own. The unicorn always takes a different path, passing freely through everything in its way—though it largely keeps to the streets rather than plunging through buildings—and it seems not to see any other creatures. For almost a century, this haunting has recurred at irregular times, and been taken as a warning of various dire events by citizens, faiths, and groups. For example, it has been said that the unicorn's appearance has presaged the death of a Harper, as well as that of a believer of the fading faith of Lurue. Some believe the unicorn is a harbinger of the passing of one of the legendary talking unicorns of power, who are wiser and more powerful than most of its kind. And some believe that the appearance of this spirit is a warning that something valuable and vital will be stolen from Silverymoon.

✦ Floating heads or masks that appear before doors they guard. Such doors are typically the entrances to family crypts, but also certain temple vaults and bedchambers where particular persons died or specific secrets are still hidden. These heads or masks speak to the living, usually threatening dire consequences if intruders do certain things, and providing cryptic clues about things intruders could or should do that would benefit them, or fulfill some long-standing purpose.

Apparitions of various sorts, from coaches racing through the night to the long-dead heads of families marching to dooms they met decades ago, are common in many places in the Realms in the wake of the Spellplague, but only the whispering voices and floating, talking heads and masks are found in other cities of Faerûn. The rest seem unique to Silverymoon.

Meeting the Gentle Ghost

In addition to these other specters, a new apparition has joined Silverymoon's existing hauntings. First seen some twenty winters ago, she seems to have grown bolder, appearing with more frequency about fourteen winters back. The Gentle Ghost of Silverymoon takes the form of a silent, translucent, faintly-glowing phantom of a robed, cloaked elf lady who flits about the streets of the city. Seen only in moonlight, she almost always seems solid and fully present from the waist up. The rest of her body trails away into her amorphous, flowing cloak, and often into invisibility below knee-level.

Most who see her say she drifts along smoothly rather than moving her legs as if walking, and very few report having seen her feet (and those who have all say she wears boots rising higher than her knees). Everyone who has seen her claims that she floats well above the ground. Were she standing, her feet would not be on the cobbles, but on something about 4 feet above them.

All observers also agree in her coloring. She is bluish-white (a darker purple-blue in the shadows of her cowl and where her body fades away), her skin of the same hue as her cloak and robes. She is dark-eyed, her face beautiful and fine-featured, framed by long, unbound flowing hair of a blue so dark as to be almost black. Her robes have full, flaring sleeves that extend just below her wrists, and a deep, V-necked bodice that leaves her collarbones bare but is held together by a fine cross-chain to prevent it gaping open to her waist. Her cloak is as light and flowing as the robes but has a cowl that is always up, surround-

ing but not hiding her head. She also wears a fine chain headband that may be fastened to the cowl to prevent it shifting (so it never conceals her face or falls back off her head). Her garb never changes.

The Gentle Ghost moves along the streets and alleys of present-day Silverymoon with obvious awareness of objects and beings around her. Smiling gently, she looks into the eyes of those she encounters. Her own eyes have been described as large, dark, and solemn, sometimes with "the night stars mirrored in them," as some poetic souls have been heard to exclaim. She sees events around her and reactions to her, but the impression she leaves is that she seems to be calmly seeking someone.

She also appears to be in no hurry, nor in any state of agitation (even when attacked), and ignores most threats, queries, and comments—though observers swear she gives some response to indicate that she hears them. She will even turn to stare hard at someone who says something impolite about her, even far behind her back. The Gentle Ghost can't be touched; solid objects and bodies, living or dead, pass through her as if she simply isn't there. Such contact leaves her and the objects and persons she touches utterly unaffected—except when she swoops.

When the Ghost Swoops

A rare few of the beings the Gentle Ghost meets she seems to recognize—not necessarily as people she's met before. Most of them are certain they've never met *her* before, and don't recognize her or whoever she was when alive. These rare individuals she reacts to in dramatic fashion. She swoops down on them, rapidly passing through them and moving on, fading into invisibility right after doing so. Such an encounter also means she will not reappear until the next moonlit night.

Everyone who has experienced such an encounter claims to have felt an intense chill. Many victims of such contact collapse on the spot, falling unconscious for brief periods. Other than minor injuries from their falls, they seem unharmed by the experience, but they are *not* unaffected. Any being the Gentle Ghost of Silverymoon passes through instantly receives a vivid mental vision: a single still view of a location.

This scene is always accompanied by two feelings: the victim always knows the general distance and direction to the location from wherever the encounter with the Gentle Ghost occurred, and a sensation that something important is hidden there. No two individuals who have had this encounter have seen the same locale. The visions remain bright, detailed, and easily recalled, although the sense of distance and direction fades over time.

The locales are usually fairly distant from Silverymoon (at least a few days' ride), although one was actually in the city. Those who find the place shown to them all report a strange sensation that rose and fell in their bodies as they moved around the spot, guiding them to hidden caches. Sometimes these secret deposits have already been plundered by others, but others have held powerful magic or great wealth from the past.

Who Was She?

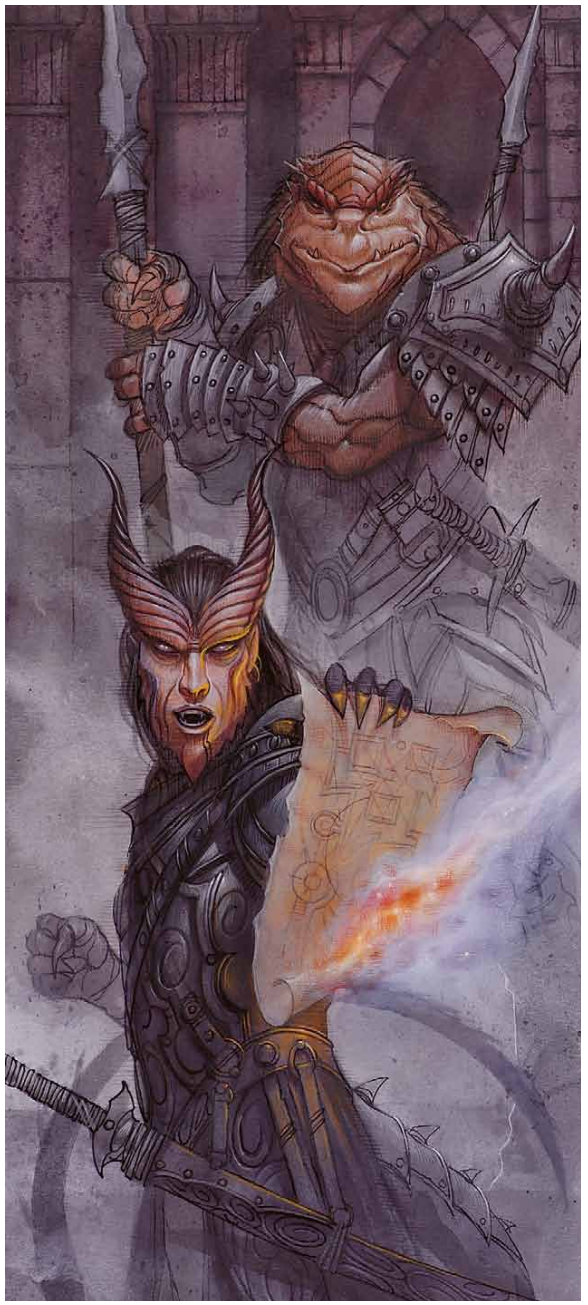
No one knows who the Gentle Ghost was in life, other than an eladrin who seemed to have dwelt in Silverymoon. Wild tales about her origins, intentions, and nature abound, but all that is certain is that the treasures she points to date from before the Spellplague, and were owned or placed by folk of Silverymoon.

About the Author

Ed Greenwood is the man who unleashed the Forgotten Realms on an unsuspecting world. He works in libraries, writes fantasy, science fiction, horror, mystery, and even romance stories (sometimes all in the same novel), but he is still happiest churning out Realmslore, Realmslore, and more Realmslore. There are still a few rooms in his house with space left to pile up papers in . . .

Episode 24: In With the Old

BY JAMES WYATT
illustration by Wayne England



Last month, I celebrated the 10-year anniversary of my employment at Wizards by taking a look back at the various games I've run in those 10 years. What's been on my mind lately is the campaigns I ran before that, back in my civilian days. I've been thinking a lot about 'getting the band back together', reuniting the friends I used to play D&D with for a journey back into the campaign we played for years, set in ancient Rome. In fact, as I write this, I'm on an airplane headed for my home town of Ithaca, New York, a trip that I'm hoping will involve at least some D&D with old friends.

At the same time, I've been thinking back even further to the campaign world I developed when I was in high school and ran games in, off and on, until about 10 years ago. Partly, that's been inspired by various conversations with Jeremy Crawford, who has been running games in the same world of his creation for many years and many editions of D&D.

So I figured this time I'd talk a bit about both those campaigns and reflect on both what I've learned about campaign design since then, and also what they might be able to remind me about world-building.

Aquela

One year at a Gen Con seminar, to get a sense of the audience, Rob Heinsoo asked a series of questions and asked for a show of hands with each one. One question was, "How many people here have registered the name of their D&D campaign world as an internet domain name?" I raised my hand. My personal home on the web is aquela.com, and I'm aquelajames on Twitter. Aquela is the campaign world I designed in high school, and at some level it sums up my personal investment in D&D.

There's nothing particularly unique about the world itself. It's a water world—that's where the name came from. I was looking for a word starting with AQ to echo "aquatic," the dictionary gave me the constellation Aquila, and I changed a letter. I then proceeded to name all the gods of the world after other constellations: Eridanus, Vela, Ophiuchus, Delphinus, Corvus, Carina, Lyra, and so on.

In most of its incarnations over the years, Aquela has been dominated by a great world-spanning empire that's also a magocracy (ruled by wizards). I have devoted pages and pages to detailing the world's culture, starting in 8th grade social studies class when the teacher gave us a handy form to fill out,

outlining various categories that describe real-world human cultures. That worksheet is still visible in the outline of my culture chapters, translated into the section heads for the family, values, shelter, food, clothing, arts, leisure, religion, and so on. In college, where I majored in religion, I expanded the religion sections tremendously, writing pages and pages about the Temple Cult and its practices, various popular cults and beliefs, and more.

I also did a lot of rules work. I designed a lot of new races, mostly aquatic or semi-aquatic monsters made available for player characters. (Some of that work was published in *Dragon* Magazine in an article called "Heroes of the Sea.") I designed classes, like a spellsword class—a hybrid warrior and spellcaster that reflected the importance of magic in the empire. And in 2nd Edition, I designed a lot of character kits to reflect the cultures and religions of the world.

What's most interesting to me, looking back at Aquela after almost 10 years of not really doing anything with it, is how different my approach to campaign-building is now. Partly, that's the reality of adult life versus life in middle and high school: I just don't have time to put as much work into describing cultures and religions as I did when I was 15. I mentioned at the end of my last column that I approach the role of the Dungeon Master very much from the perspective that it shouldn't require a lot of work.

But that doesn't mean I can't make use of the work I did when I was 15. I think, actually, that's the beauty of what Jeremy has done with his long-standing world. He has run many different campaigns in the same world and incorporated all of them into the story of the world. As our characters in his campaign are just discovering, the world has been destroyed and reborn many times through its mythic history, and the world they now inhabit is just its latest incarnation. But each time he runs a game there, certain characters, villains, monsters, and story elements reappear. If nothing else, Jeremy's long background running the game gives him abundant material to draw on when he needs to wing it.

For the last couple of months, I've been thinking about dusting off Aquela and running a new campaign there. The last time I did that in earnest was 1993, which was also the first time I approached the job in anything like the same way I would now. I chose a limited geographical area—a single archipelago with the benefit of being a place where a couple of different cultures intersected. And I created a campaign story revolving around a lich-queen (and heavily influenced by the *Ravenloft* campaign setting).

So a couple of weeks ago, I sat down and started thinking about what I would do with a new Aquela campaign. I started by looking over page 150 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide,* which outlines the core assumptions of the D&D world. Which ones did I want to apply to Aquela, and which would I change?

- *The world is a fantastic place.* Definitely true of Aquela, with its magocracy and aquatic dragons. In the past, I think I've occasionally strayed away from this and let it become too mundane, but I don't want to go that direction this time.
- *The world is ancient.* Also true. Like most other fantasy worlds, Aquela has its ancient empires of elves and humans. I'm pretty sure it can accommodate a Bael Turath and an Arkhosia, too, if I decide I want them.
- *The world is mysterious.* I want to dial this up more than I have in the past. One drawback of top-down world design, where you draw a map of the whole known world and drill down from there, is that it can kill that sense of mystery. But one of the great strengths of a water world is that it's easy to drop an uncharted island anywhere you want one, even if all the major archipelagos are carefully mapped.
- *Monsters are everywhere.* Definitely true—and especially in the oceans. I think I'll want to stat up merfolk (though I've been considering calling female tritons mermaids), locathah, dragon turtles, krakens, selkies, seawolves, and other classic aquatic monsters that haven't made an appearance in 4th Edition yet. (Don't worry, I'll share when I do.) I might even revisit monsters like the scrag and the merrow, since I think I can make them more interesting than just trolls and ogres with the aquatic keyword and a swim speed.
- *Adventurers are exceptional.* I don't want to change that assumption. I like for the players to feel that their characters make a difference and have an important role to play in the unfolding story of the world.
- *The civilized races band together.* This is one I have changed in the past, and I think I want to try my old take on it. On Aquela, the fall of the ancient elven empires has left elves a much more wild, almost savage race than they're commonly portrayed as. Meanwhile, the dwarves are having a renaissance, perhaps on their way to being the next great race, gaining ascendancy even over humans. I aesthetically like wild elves and (Eberron-like) renaissance dwarves, so I'll keep them in. I don't want to make too much of the strife and conflict between these races, because I want player character elves, dwarves, and humans to play nice together. But it will still be unusual to see elves in human cities.

- *Magic is not everyday, but it is natural.* On Aquela, magic has always been everyday. I have experimented with rules that let characters and even average citizens use basic wizard cantrips. I don't want to take that too far—I think one of the things that makes a magocracy an interesting form of government is that there's a sharp division between the ruling class of mages and the bulk of the citizenry who can't use magic.
- *Gods and primordials shaped the world.* This is where my thoughts started to get really interesting. With the world defined by its oceans and named after the god of the sea, I had always made the elements important. The Temple Cult of the empire had ten deities—three "gods" (a law goddess comparable to Erathis, plus a goddess of magic and learning described as the law-goddess's mind, and a goddess of love described as her heart) and seven "elementals" (the four classic elements plus light, darkness, and shadow). So what if some or all of those "elementals" are actually primordials? What if they betrayed the other primordials in the Dawn War and helped the gods to win a decisive victory, earning a place in the Temple Cult as a reward? This idea intrigues me, and I'll come back to it in a minute.
- *Gods are distant.* With its realistic religions inspired by my academic background, Aquela has sometimes erred too far in this direction. The gods of the Temple Cult, in particular, have been too abstract, impersonal, and uninvolved in the world, though I've had a host of lesser gods and cults keeping things interesting. (One campaign I ran on Aquela used a cult of the moon as the main villain.) I want to make sure, this time around, that I have exarchs and angels acting on the gods' behalf, which should work well with the story that's beginning to form in my mind.

So once I'd reviewed those core assumptions, I turned to page 134 in the DMG, the section on campaign themes. What would be the theme of a new Aquela campaign?

My eyes pretty quickly landed on "Primordial Threat" (page 136). One of the ideas that I built into Aquela from the very beginning was that this would be a world where the conflict between law and chaos was more important than the conflict between good and evil. That's not as easily mapped out in the alignment system of 4th edition as it was in past editions of the game, but despite that, in many ways it works better than it ever did. The story of the Dawn War, the conflict between gods and primordials, is fundamentally the story of the conflict between Law and Chaos, with the gods on the side of Law, seeking to preserve their creation and its ordered ways, while the primordials are forces of chaos—hence the name of their planar home.

So my story about the four primordials who joined the gods in the Dawn War works really well. My Erathis-figure deity becomes the ruler of the pantheon, the one who established order in the wake of the Dawn War and continues to keep the turncoat primordials in check. If ever her control wavers, the results could be disastrous, starting with the ocean raging out of control.

That becomes the nugget of my campaign's story. I'm not certain of the right implementation yet. There could be a breakaway sect devoted to the four primordials who seek to overthrow the reign of the gods. Or the primordials themselves could rise up against the gods' power, starting a new Dawn War that the characters must survive—long enough to strike a decisive blow for one side or the other at the end of the campaign.

As I flesh out this idea, I have a ton of material I can draw on. I just need to be careful that I don't let the old material distract me too much. I find that whenever I start thinking about this, I get distracted with trying to read very old file formats, or just reading through pages and pages of old stuff instead of focusing on generating new content.

The other thing I want to approach carefully is the amount of new rules design I take on. That's my day job, after all, and I don't want to get bogged down in it at the expense of crafting exciting adventures for my players. Does Aquela really *need* crabfolk as a player race? I'm not sure it does.

The Imperium Romanum

I wrote my college honors thesis on Roman Egypt. As I worked, I got to thinking about running a D&D campaign set in that environment. When I went back home after graduation, it turned out that my friend David had been toying with similar ideas about a campaign set in Roman Britain. Suddenly, a new shared-world campaign was born, with each DM claiming a certain region of the first-century Roman world as his own and characters moving somewhat freely among them.

In the briefcase by my feet right now, I've stuffed all the documentation I could find about the very first adventure I ran in that campaign, an exploration of an old Egyptian tomb. My hope is that I can get enough of the old group back together, while I'm in Ithaca, to revisit that campaign. I'm thinking about having everyone recreate the characters they played from scratch, using 4th edition instead of 2nd, and just pretending we're starting all over. I think it could be a blast.

That campaign was very talky. At the end of the first adventure, the characters discovered that the villain was actually a wizard who had been polymorphed into an orc, and my friend Paul's wizard spent a whole followup adventure navigating the complex social circles of the secret wizard schools of the city of Tanis. I would love to structure that adventure as a skill challenge and give it more form than the very loose adventure I ran 20 years ago.

Interestingly, because it was a shared-world campaign with multiple DMs, I put more effort into teaching people how to DM than ever before or since. Some of the advice I put together survives, and it's fascinating for me to look back at it and compare it to the advice I've written professionally in the last few years.

In my DMing for the Imperium Romanum campaign, I put a tremendous emphasis on plot and characters—really, primarily on characters as plot drivers. I had notes for hundreds of NPCs. I used consistent groups of NPCs as antagonists and plot drivers in adventure after adventure: the Alexandrian thieves' guild, the cult of the baboon-god Dubana, and the various groups of wizards in Tanis. When I needed to create an adventure, I looked primarily to my database of NPCs.

That's something that has been missing from the Greenbrier campaign as I've been running it. I devoted a column to the villains of Greenbrier, describing the Keepers, the Kindred of the Shattered Gate, Those Who Hear, and the dragons of my Chamber-analogue. But I haven't really done anything with them in play. Partly, I think the lunchtime format is getting in my way. Partly, I think I could afford to spend just a little more time preparing for my sessions. But perhaps the largest factor is that I have to get back into the right mindset of thinking about NPCs, both villains and third parties, as drivers for the story of the campaign—without, of course, letting them overshadow the player characters and their part in the story.

Coming in for a Landing

My laptop battery is getting low and we're close to beginning our descent. I set out to look at these two old campaigns from a twin perspective: applying my current thinking about campaign design to my old worlds, and seeing if those old campaigns could improve Greenbrier in any way. It turned out that I mostly did the former with Aquela, and the latter with the Imperium Romanum. But that seems OK.

For Aquela, I went in search of the big story that the world has often lacked. The Greenbrier campaign has its big story—the Speaker in Dreams that escaped from Greenbrier Chasm and its influence on the world. That approach, combined with some solid advice from the DMG, helped me settle on a campaign theme for Aquela and a new way of looking at some of its old ideas.

With the Imperium Romanum, it was more a matter of remembering what I most enjoyed about that campaign and trying to apply it to what I'm running now. There's clearly more thinking to be done on that topic, though, so stay tuned!

And the only trick now is figuring out if I can email this article back to the office in time for it to go online! Wish me luck . . .

About the Author

James Wyatt is the D&D Design Manager for Wizards of the Coast Roleplaying R&D. He was one of the lead designers for Dungeons & Dragons 4th Edition and the primary author of the 4th Edition *Dungeon Master's Guide*. He was one of the designers of the *Eberron Campaign Setting* and is the author of several Eberron novels.

Bringing Skills to Life

by Mike Mearls
Illustration by Raven Mimura

Last month, I talked about immersing your characters in a skill challenge. This month, I'm presenting a skill challenge I ran in my *Temple of Elemental Evil* campaign. If you played the original adventure, you'll probably notice a few changes I've made to the story and characters.

Skill Challenge: Falrinth's Bargain

After battling the minions of the wizard Falrinth, the characters cornered him in his laboratory. Falrinth works for Obmi, a sinister dwarf assassin and devoted lieutenant of the demigod Iuz. Obmi has long been a thorn in the characters' sides, and Falrinth recognizes the characters from the dwarf's description of them. When they burst into his lab, he has one goal in mind: escape with his life and make sure that the *orb of golden death* does not fall into their hands. The skill challenge is a test to see whether the characters can break Falrinth's loyalty to Obmi and persuade him to hand over the *orb*.

This format is a little different from other skill challenges I've presented. It shows off my notes, but it focuses more on the procedures I used to run the challenge.

Here's the roleplaying stat block for Falrinth. I used it as a reference throughout the challenge:

Falrinth

Key Traits: Voice of reason, logical and thorough, delivers dire threats in an off-hand manner

Goal: Escape from the heroes, prevent them from finding the *orb of golden death*

Motivation: Avoid Obmi's wrath

Fears: Obmi's wrath

Weaknesses: Greed

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Be sure to read the previous installment of this series for a full explanation of these entries. Most of them are self-explanatory, but some (like key traits) have other layers to them.

The Skill Challenge

I ran this encounter as a complexity 1 skill challenge, requiring 4 successes before 3 failures. It was broken into two phases. First, Falrinth threatened the characters with a horrible death. He trapped a number of demons in a runic circle and told the characters that if he is harmed, the demons would escape and attack them. Using that threat, he tried to bargain with the adventurers.

Once that threat set the tone, Falrinth tried to trick the characters into accepting a worthless gauntlet disguised with *Nystal's magic aura*. It appeared magical, but an in-depth study over the course of an extended rest would show the item as a fraud. Falrinth hoped to trick the characters, persuade them to leave, and recover the *orb* once the characters had moved on.

The Encounter

When the characters burst into the room, I described the scene to them. The lab was a rectangular room with two workbenches, one along the southern wall and another on the eastern wall. There was a space of empty wall between them with a secret door leading to the real lab. Between the two tables, on the floor, were inscribed magical runes to bind the demons.

A thick mist hovered above the runes, and in it, the characters could see the flash of feral eyes and the occasional bestial growl.

As the characters entered the room, Falrinth delivered his threat. He told them that if he was harmed, the demons would rampage through the dungeon and kill the characters. Instead, he was willing to strike a bargain for his life. At this point, the players and I roleplayed this scene with in-character dialogue. I kept my ears open for cues to ask for skill checks. When a player described an action that I felt contributed to the skill challenge, I asked that player for a check and tracked successes and failures.

Inspecting the Runes: If a player asked about the runes, I let him make an Arcana check. A successful check contributed to the skill challenge and told the character that while the demons would escape if the circle collapsed, such as by erasing the chalk lines used to draw it, there was no evidence that the demons were bound to Falrinth's will. They'd likely attack him and then return to the Abyss. On a missed check, the characters took a failure in the skill challenge and wrongly determined that Falrinth's threat was accurate. The demons were trapped and bound to his will. They'd attack everyone, the characters and Falrinth, if unleashed.

Talking to Falrinth: I let the players' dialogue drive whether I asked for a Diplomacy or Intimidate check. Bluff I allowed only under extraordinary circumstances. Falrinth is Obmi's highest ranking lieutenant, and any deception would be hard to get past him. Diplomacy had the moderate DC, while Intimidate and Bluff (if I allowed it) had the hard DC. If the characters made their Arcana check to inspect the runes and told Falrinth that they had seen through his lie, the Intimidate DC dropped to easy.

Interspersing skill checks within dialogue is tricky. Keep an ear tuned for pauses in the conversation or points where the players make particularly dramatic or interesting statements. If more than one player speaks to an NPC, let the players pick one person to make the check and another to assist. As usual, particularly good roleplaying should earn the player a +2 or +4 bonus.

The characters can make as many of these checks as they want until the skill challenge ends. With successes, Falrinth's will begins to fold. He becomes more open to their proposals and more active in bargaining with them. His resolve clearly wavers. With each failure, Falrinth mocks the characters and hardens his attitude. He tells them of the cruel vengeance Obmi has in store for them and that he is not afraid to die.

Searching the Room: The characters could scan the room for clues, but I set the DC high. If they tried to enter the room, Falrinth threatened to unleash the demons. On a success, the characters didn't gain a success against the skill challenge but they did notice that the floor along the wall between the workbenches, where the secret door was located, was surprisingly dust-free. Falrinth had walked there many times, preventing dust from building up.

If the characters figure out that Falrinth is lying about the demons and search the room over his objections, they might find the secret door (hard DC). If they do find the door, Falrinth immediately attacks or flees depending on the situation. Once that happens, the characters gain no XP for the skill challenge but must fight (or chase) the mage.

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Studying the Mage: The characters could use Insight with a hard DC to get a read on Falrinth. On a success, they gained a success in the skill challenge and noticed that Falrinth is nervous about the demons and keeps glancing at the point in the wall where the secret door is hidden. On a failure, the characters missed both those cues and believed that he was confident and telling the truth.

Multiple Checks: Other than talking with Falrinth, I counted only the first skill check as contributing to a success or failure. Future checks could reveal information, but they did nothing to advance the challenge.

Success and Failure

If the characters failed the challenge, Falrinth was convinced that they are too weak and foolish to oppose him. He remained faithful to Obmi and resolved himself to die, if necessary, to protect his master's interests. He offered them the worthless gauntlet described above, confident that they could not see through his deception. If the characters failed the challenge, they couldn't succeed at Arcana or Insight checks to see through his deception. It was too late to pick up on it. Once the characters left, he took the *orb* and departed to find Obmi.

If the characters succeeded, they cowed Falrinth into helping them. He would show them the secret door and leave the temple, never to return. He would likely end up dead by Obmi's hand.

Those, however, were only two possible outcomes. The characters could have attacked Falrinth, or he might have decided to attack them. If a battle broke out, the characters gained no XP for the skill challenge. In addition, the hidden chamber had several traps they might blunder into if they had to find the *orb* without Falrinth's help. Part of the art in building skill challenges is recognizing that the challenge cannot become a railroad. If the characters want to fight, roll for initiative. If they decide to leave, the challenge remains unresolved and the NPCs act in their absence as you judge fit.

In Play

In my campaign, the players failed the skill challenge. They managed to miss Arcana, Insight, and Diplomacy checks, leaving them unable to persuade Falrinth to help them. He offered them the gauntlet, which they gladly accepted and went on their way. The information they learned from the failed Arcana and Insight checks made them think he was telling the truth about the demons. After a tough battle with his guards, they were not ready for another fight. Once the characters took an extended rest, they discovered the wizard's treachery, stormed back to his lab, found the secret room ransacked, and swore vengeance against him. A new ongoing villain for my campaign was born!

I did use one bit of DM trickery to keep the characters on their toes. After failing the challenge, I kept the dialogue going for a few moments and asked for a few more checks. That helped conceal the true outcome from the more savvy players. I also waited for a few, seeming successes before Falrinth made his offer. In story terms, Falrinth acted cowed in order to sell the players on his deception. In mechanical terms, I didn't allow for the opportunity of metagame knowledge ("We made only three checks, we must've failed!") to intrude into the game.

You can also make checks secretly for the players to help add some uncertainty to the mechanical outcome of the scene. This tool is particularly useful in more freeform skill challenges such as this one, where the players can dodge failure by attacking or refusing to leave Falrinth's lair. You don't want to simply disallow such actions without any logical reason, but on the other hand, even well-meaning players might figure out the mechanics behind the scene and be forced into an unsatisfying situation.

About the Author

Mike Mearls is the Lead Designer for the Dungeons & Dragons® roleplaying game. His recent credits include *Player's Handbook™ 3*, *Hammerfast™*, and *Primal Power™*.

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